

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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by Brett Halliday

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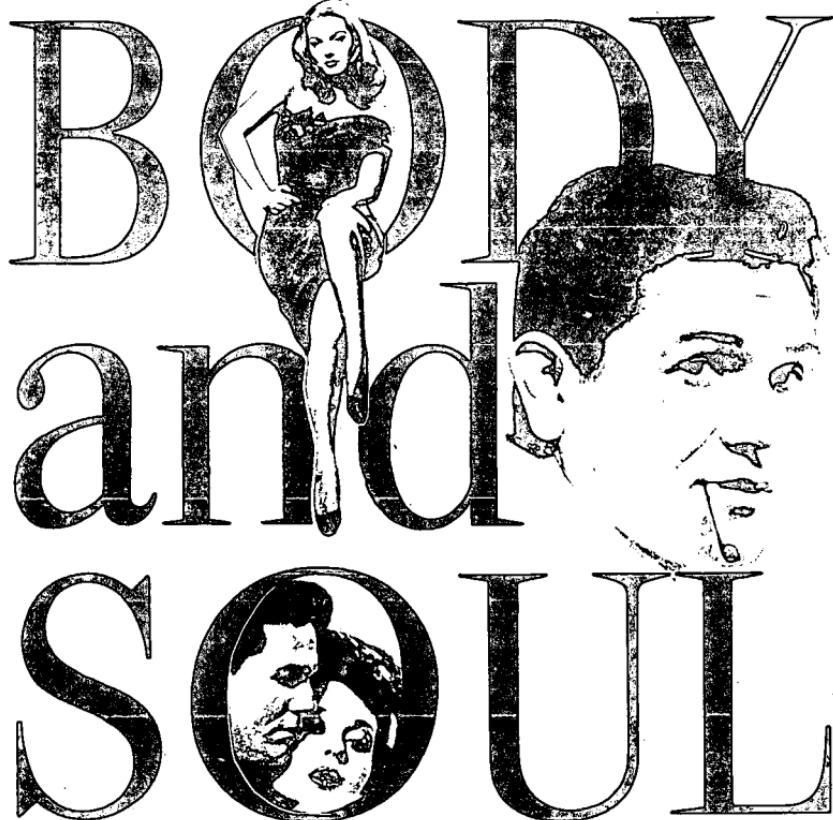
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

FISHING FOR MURDER

by Brett Halliday

It was a good day to go fishing—but suddenly Mike Shayne had a gun in his hand instead of a fishing pole, and he was fishing for dead men and the killers who murdered them!..... 4

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Was it just another car accident—or was it a deliberate killing? Mike Shayne found himself fishing for a murderer—with himself as the bait!

Fishing For Murder

by BRETT HALLIDAY

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT, STARS SPRINKLED ALL OVER the black velvet sky, and Pat Harrington thought that he should have been enjoying it more than he was. The headlights of his rented car cut a swath through the darkness ahead of him, but when he glanced out to the side, he could see starlight and a faint glow from a quarter moon reflecting off the gently rolling water of the ocean. He sped northward over the causeways, past the little towns of the Florida Keys that were mostly dark now in the middle of the night. With every mile that rolled beneath him, he was closer to Miami, closer to the airport, closer to his home.

Palatine, Illinois, would look awfully good to him after this job. The work had been pleasant enough, he had no complaints about that, but he was ready to see Bonnie again. He had missed her, of course, and he wanted to talk to her, to tell her about what was on his mind.

Pat Harrington was a troubled man.

He played with the dial on the radio, trying to find a station he liked. There was no danger of him falling asleep at the wheel, but he felt like he needed some company, even if it was just a voice on the airwaves. Traffic was light on the highway, and the long pattern of causeways and Keys didn't alter much.

Pat glanced in the rearview mirror. A pair of headlights had popped up behind him, but they were a long way back.

He held the wheel easily in his right hand, propped his left arm in the open window and let the cool night air wash over him. The breeze ruffled his sandy brown hair.

The lights behind him were closer now. Pat looked at the speedometer and saw that he was clipping along at just under sixty. That meant the car coming up behind him had to really be moving, as it was visibly closing the gap.

He didn't give the other vehicle more than a fleeting thought, though. His mind was too full of other things: home, and Bonnie, and getting back to his normal work. He was glad the Coast Guard had called on him for help; that showed that the work he had done for police and fire departments all over the country was paying off. The Coast Guard had their own communications people. That they would call in an outside expert showed what they thought of him.

The work had been challenging enough to be fun, too. Overall, he should have had a good feeling about now, what with the job completed successfully and a generous paycheck on the way from the government.

But instead, something was wrong, something that ate at the back of his brain until he was driving automatically and concentrating on the unexpected problem that had sprung up. He supposed he should have told someone about it before he left the Coast Guard station on Hawkins Key, but he had hesitated, reluctant to make trouble where there might not be any.

He frowned and lifted a hand to push his rimless glasses back up on his nose. They always slipped down when he frowned.

THE HEADLIGHTS WERE RIGHT BEHIND HIM NOW, HE SUD-
denly realized, and they were damn bright, too. He squinted as the glare filled his eyes, then relaxed gratefully as the other car swung out into the other lane and went past him with a roar. Passing was no trouble at this time of night. This fast car with the bright lights was the only other one he'd see in the last twenty minutes or so. It swerved back in front of him and seemed to put on even more speed. The red glow of the taillights steadily drew away from him and finally vanished around a long, gentle curve up ahead.

The miles and the minutes zipped past, but Pat's mind didn't ease any. The rental car rolled onto one of the longer causeways, fully two miles from one end to the other. The posts of the guard rails flashed by in the night, hardly seen.

But Pat saw the sudden reflection up ahead. The headlights bounced off the chrome of a stopped a car about the middle of the causeway,

and Pat took his foot off the gas to let the car begin slowing down. He didn't hit the brake yet but waited until he got closer, until he could see what was going on.

The car that had passed him earlier was stopped in the road, completely blocking the right lane, hood up. Pat slowed down even more and thought about what he should do. The other lane was clear; he could move over, go around the stalled car, and continue on his way to the airport. But his flight wasn't leaving until six-thirty in the morning. He had plenty of time to get there.

Someone was standing in front of the car, Pat saw as his car came to a gradual stop several feet behind the other one. He couldn't tell if it was a man or woman, but whoever it was, if they were stuck out here on the highway—in the middle of a *causeway*, for God's sake—then they could use a helping hand.

Pat Harrington was a decent guy. No hero, but a decent guy. He killed the engine of his car, opened the door, and got out to help.

He shouldn't have.

In the glare of the headlights he had left on, he saw the figure bending over the open hood start to move. Pat said in a friendly voice, "Need some help? You ought to put some flashers out—"

Something moved behind him. He started to turn, but before he could get around, a hard blow slammed into the side of his head. The stars in the sky above seemed to explode as Pat sank to his knees and clutched at his head. A moan came from his throat. An arm lifted, came down quickly. There was another dull thud, then another.

The thudding sounds stopped. Cars doors slammed, engines came to life.

Then a crashing, ripping chaos of sound, followed seconds later by a huge splash . . .

One car drove off the causeway, headed back south again, and once it was gone, the night was quiet except for the lapping of the water against the pillars of the causeway. In a few hours it would be morning.

II

"GOOD MORNING, MICHAEL," LUCY HAMILTON SAID FROM her desk as Shayne strolled into the office. She didn't look up from her typing as her redhead boss tossed his hat onto the rack just inside the door and then settled a hip on the corner of the desk.

Shayne's grey eyes regarded his pretty secretary's face for a moment, then a smile creased his lean face. "Hell, it's too nice a day to spend it inside, Angel. Let's lock the door, find a boat, and get a little fishing in."

Lucy pulled the sheet of paper from the typewriter, placed it in a neat pile with several others, and said, "That's no way to run a business, Michael. You can't just close up and take off every time you feel like it."

Shayne ran blunt fingers through the rumpled thatch of red hair on his head. "Why the hell not?"

Lucy inclined her head toward the doorway. "For one thing, you've got a client coming in," she said in a soft voice.

Shayne stood up and swung toward the door. The man coming into the office paused, met the big detective's gaze, and said, "You're Mike Shayne, aren't you?"

"Guilty as charged," Shayne grunted. "Come in." He glanced at Lucy, saw the twinkle of amusement in her eyes. They both knew the possibility of taking the day off was dwindling.

The newcomer stuck out a hand. His grip was firm and strong as Shayne shook it. "My name is John Baker," he said. "I'd like to talk to you about a murder."

One of Shayne's craggy red brows quirked upward. "All right," he said. "Let's go into my office. By the way, this is Miss Hamilton, my secretary."

Baker nodded pleasantly enough to Lucy, but he seemed preoccupied, no doubt by the murder he had mentioned. Shayne wondered fleetingly if he wanted one solved or committed.

When they were settled on opposite sides of the scarred old desk in Shayne's private office, Baker took out a cigar and asked, "Do you mind?"

Shayne shook his head and fired up a cigarette of his own. "Now what's this about a murder?" he asked as he leaned back in his chair.

Baker hesitated before answering, and Shayne used the moment to study the man. Baker was in his forties, Shayne guessed, solidly built and a little below medium height. There was a touch of gray in his dark hair, and he wore a moustache that gave him a slightly military appearance.

"I'm from South Carolina, Mr. Shayne," he finally said, "and I've come down here because a friend of mine was recently killed."

"I'm not licensed to operate anywhere except in the state of Florida," Shayne told him.

"This is where Pat was killed, down in the Keys." Baker puffed on his cigar, and his voice remained calm and level as he went on, "I want you to find out who killed him."

Despite Baker's obvious self-control, Shayne could see the pain in his eyes as he talked about his friend's death. "Have you been to the

police?" Shayne asked.

Baker waved a hand in dismissal of the police. "They say the whole thing was an accident. But I know better, Mr. Shayne."

"Suppose you start at the beginning and tell me about it."

"Pat—that's Pat Harrington—was driving up through the Keys when his car went off one of the causeways. He didn't make it out. The wreck happened late at night, and the cops say he went to sleep at the wheel. I don't buy it."

"Why not?"

Baker grimaced. "This is going to sound flimsy, Mr. Shayne, but I know Pat too well to believe it. Knew him, I should say." For the first time, bitterness crept into Baker's voice. "He traveled a lot, drove a lot at night. He never had any trouble staying awake on the road."

"So far as you know," Shayne pointed out.

"His wife Bonnie agrees with me. I talked the whole thing over with her before I came down here. She thinks Pat was murdered, too."

"What was he doing down here? Was he from South Carolina, too?"

Baker shook his head. "No, we met in the service. But we've kept in touch ever since. Pat lived in Illinois, in a town called Palatine, but he worked all over the country designing communications systems for police departments and fire departments. He was good at it, too, good enough that the Coast Guard asked him to come down here and do some work for them. He had finished that up and was on his way back to Miami so he could catch a plane. He was on his way home."

"And you say he was killed in a car accident?"

"His car went through a guardrail and into the ocean. Another driver saw the break in the rail and got in touch with the authorities. They found Pat's car on the bottom. He . . . he was in it. They said he hit his head when the car went through the rail and was unconscious. He never even had a chance to get out, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne rubbed his jaw and wondered how blunt to be with this man. "Sounds pretty cut-and-dried to me, Mr. Baker," he said slowly. "And it doesn't sound like murder."

Baker leaned forward, face intense, cigar forgotten in his hand. "But it could have been murder," he insisted. "It could have been arranged to look like an accident."

Shayne shrugged. "Maybe. But I'm afraid you need more to base that on than a hunch."

"I've got more." Baker paused again, as if he was about to reveal something that he considered a secret. "Pat and I were in the Navy together," he finally said, "but not in the same part. Pat worked for

Intelligence. He never told exactly what his job was; he wasn't *allowed* to tell me. Same with his wife. He couldn't even tell Bonnie anything about his work."

"And you think something out of his past was the reason he was killed," Shayne finished, his mind working along the same as Baker's but not necessarily drawing the same conclusions. "I suppose that's possible," Shayne said non-committally.

"I'm convinced of it," Baker said firmly.

Shayne blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling and studied the drifting blue haze. His first impulse was to tell Baker that he was being too suspicious and to send him home to South Carolina, but the sincerity was evident in the man's voice. Shayne glanced at the intercom on his desk. It was open, and he knew that Lucy had been listening in. Baker's story was just the kind that she would fall for, full of hush-hush military secrets and devotion to a dead buddy. If he sent Baker packing, he wouldn't get anything but a frosty politeness from Lucy for a couple of days.

And hell, how long would it take to check with Will Gentry and find out the rest of the details about Harrington's fatal accident? If there really wasn't anything to be suspicious about, as he was willing to be, this "case" could be wrapped up by noon.

That left a lot of time to pick up his original plan.

"I'll do some preliminary checking for you," Shayne said abruptly. "But let's not say I'm officially on the case yet." He added sharply as Baker reached for his wallet, "That means no retainer just yet. I'm just going to ask a few unofficial questions."

"I don't mind paying . . ." Baker began.

"And if I think there's a legitimate case here, I don't mind taking your money," Shayne told him bluntly.

Baker nodded. "All right. We'll leave it at that for now." He stood up. "I know you're not sure about this, Mr. Shayne, but I am. I know Pat was murdered. I know it in my bones. And I've read enough about you in the papers to know that you're the man to find his killer."

"We'll see."

Shayne got the name of the hotel where Baker was staying and then ushered him out of the office, past the thoughtful eyes of Lucy Hamilton. When the door was closed behind him, Shayne turned back to Lucy and raised an eyebrow. "What do you think, Angel?"

"I think he's a nice man," she said. "He cares about his friend and wants to get to the bottom of his death."

"But does it sound like murder?" Shayne asked, knowing that Lucy had been around enough murder cases to spot the signs, just like him.

"Maybe . . . and maybe not," she admitted. "What are you going to do?"

"Go talk to Will, for starters, and see if he can get me a report on the accident." He grinned at her. "Then, unless I'm very surprised, I'm going to go fishing."

STILL SMILING, SHAYNE LEFT HIS FLAGLER STREET OFFICE and pointed his Buick toward Miami police headquarters. The smile left his face as he drove, though, and was replaced by a look of thoughtful concentration. He had been a detective for a long time; he knew that first impulses were usually accurate, but he also knew better than to casually dismiss any possibility.

And there was a possibility that Baker was right, that Pat Harrington had indeed been murdered.

Chief Will Gentry had the usual mountain of paperwork piled on his desk when Shayne walked into his second-floor office. Gentry glanced up at Shayne, shifted the dead, soggy cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, and growled, "I hope you're here for a good reason, Mike. I've got to catch up on this mess."

Shayne turned a straight chair backwards and settled his rangy frame on it. "I thought you were the boss around here, Will," he said with a grin. "Don't you have somebody to do that kind of thing for you?"

"Hard to get good help these days," Gentry grunted sarcastically. "What's up?"

"Can you get me a copy of the report on a car wreck that happened down in the Keys?"

"Probably. Got something to do with a case of yours?"

"It's not even a case . . . yet. But I'm poking into it."

Gentry shoved a stack of papers to one side, found a clean scrap, and picked up a stubby pencil. "All right, shoot."

Shayne gave him the details. Gentry copied them down, buzzed for an officer, and gave the notes to him. He and Shayne talked aimlessly for ten or fifteen minutes, then the officer reappeared with several sheets of paper. Gentry took them, passed them over to Shayne.

"This is the report from the sheriff's department and the county M.E.," Gentry said. "That's as much as we know."

Shayne scanned the reports, his trained eye immediately picking out the salient facts, then going back over the typed sheets more leisurely. "Looks like a simple case of a driver nodding off and crashing through a guard rail," he mused.

"Were you thinking it was something else?" Gentry asked.

Shayne shrugged and said, "Just thought I'd check it out." Even

though Baker wasn't officially his client, he didn't see any point in spreading the man's confidences.

He stood up and tossed the reports on the desk, adding to the pile and drawing a glare from Gentry. "Thanks, Will," Shayne said. "No need to bother you any more on this one."

He was halfway to the door when Gentry said, "Hey!"

Shayne looked back over his shoulder.

"Why don't you take some of this with you?" Gentry waved a paw at the confusion before him.

Shayne chuckled and shook his head. "You're the public servant, Will. I'm just a money-grubbing private eye."

Gentry was muttering agreement under his breath as Shayne walked out.

As far as Shayne could see, the facts of the matter didn't warrant any further investigation, tragic though the accident had been. John Baker might not like it, but Shayne was going to have to tell him to go home, that he was wasting his time in Florida.

The hotel where Baker was staying wasn't far out of Shayne's way as he headed back to the office. It wouldn't take him long to go by there and at least tell the man his conclusions face to face.

Shayne parked a block away from the hotel, which was one of the less expensive ones in the city, but still a decent place to stay. Baker had given him the room number, so he didn't stop in the lobby but went straight up to the fifth floor in the elevator.

Baker's room was at the end of the hall. The corridor was deserted as Shayne walked toward the door, and suddenly, unexpectedly, he found that some kind of instinctive warning bell was going off in the back of his mind.

He stopped as he realized that the door of Baker's room was open about an inch.

That might not mean anything, but when Shayne started toward the door again, he was moving more cautiously this time. Walking more silently than a man of his size should have been able to, he came to the door and stopped without knocking on it.

There were slight sounds coming from inside the room, and Shayne recognized them. A search was in progress, and Shayne couldn't think of any reason why Baker would be tossing his own room.

Which left just one answer.

Shayne put a big hand on the door and pushed. The heads of the two men inside the room snapped up as the door banged open.

"Sorry to interrupt," Shayne grated, his bulky body blocking the doorway, "but what the hell's going on here?"

And then he saw John Baker, sprawled on the floor beside the bed. There was blood on Baker's face.

III

THE MEN REACTED QUICKLY. SHAYNE ONLY HAD TIME for a glance in Baker's direction, then he had his hands full with the two burly characters who were barreling at him.

He moved his head to one side and let the first punch go past him, then stepped in to hook a hard fist into the man's stomach. Hot breath whooshed into Shayne's face. He got his hands on the man's shoulders and shoved him into the path of the other one. They banged together, and the first man went to the floor.

In falling, though, he reached out and grabbed Shayne's legs, throwing the big redhead off balance. Shayne tried to block a punch thrown by the other one but was only partially successful. Bony knuckles scraped the side of his head, knocking his hat off and making him reel. Shayne felt himself falling.

His long fingers tangled in the coat of the second man as he fell, pulling the man down on top of him. This was no time for etiquette, even if Shayne had been so inclined.

He yanked one leg loose and drove his knee into the man's groin as hard as he could.

The other man reached up and slammed a vicious blow to the back of Shayne's neck. Shayne felt pain shoot through his head, and he twisted on the floor, lashing out with a foot that caught the man in the stomach. The other one was curled up on the carpet, clutching at himself in agony, out of the fight for the moment.

Shayne surged to his feet, set himself, and launched a fist that caught the man on the point of the chin as he struggled to get up. He flew backwards, sprawling, loose-limbed.

Shayne drew a deep breath and rubbed the sore knuckles of his right hand. A hoarse moan made him turn his attention from the two men he had just defeated.

Baker was alive, at least, Shayne saw as he dropped to one knee beside the man from South Carolina. The blood on his face had dripped down from a cut just above the hairline, no doubt where one of the men had hit him. Baker seemed to be breathing all right, though, so getting slammed on the head was probably all that had happened.

Shayne heard movement behind him and let out a curse as he realized that one of the men had recovered enough to cause trouble again. He started to turn from his kneeling position, but he wasn't quite quick enough. He saw a blackjack looming in front of his eyes, and then the

weight slapped against his head.

Shayne went down, landing heavily. His head bounced off the floor, adding to the fireworks going off inside his skull. He was vaguely aware of voices and a rush of footsteps, and then the room became quiet.

HE STAYED WHERE HE WAS FOR LONG MINUTES, TRYING to recover some of his strength. He never completely lost consciousness, and he knew that the two men had left the room. Baker was moaning again and stirring around, so they hadn't come to his hotel room to kill him. They had been looking for something, though.

Shayne rolled onto his side, got his arms and legs under him, and pushed himself to his feet. He went into the bathroom, grimaced at the bruise that was already starting to show on his head, and dipped his face in the cold water at the sink. There was a metallic taste in his mouth, and he knew that a hefty dose of Martell would cure it, but that would have to wait.

He went back into the main room and saw Baker sitting up with a green look on his face. "What happened?" Baker asked in a shaky voice.

"I was about to ask you the same question," Shayne said. He stood, legs spread wide apart, and dug out a cigarette. When he had it going, he went on, "I came in and found two guys searching your room. You were laid out on the floor. Do you remember what happened before that?"

Baker started to shake his head and grimaced at the pain caused by the gesture. "Not really. Seems like . . . yeah, there was a knock on the door. I thought it might be you, so I opened it. Then . . . nothing."

"They were ready for you," Shayne grunted. "The hall was empty, so they bopped you as soon as the door was open. You'd better take a look around as soon as you feel like it and see if anything is missing."

Baker held up a hand, and Shayne grasped his wrist and hauled him to his feet. He was unsteady for a minute, until he had been to the bathroom and doused his face as Shayne had done. Then he looked around and declared that nothing was missing from the room.

"We'd better call the cops and report this, anyway," Shayne said as he scooped up the phone.

"Report what?"

The question surprised Shayne. He looked up with a scowl. "Attempted robbery and assault, that's what," he said sharply. "Those two didn't come here to dance with you."

"They came because of Pat," Baker said softly.

Shayne dropped the receiver back in its cradle. "Run that by me again."

Baker sank onto a chair and clasped his hands in front of him. "They were here because I'm poking into Pat's death," he said. "They were trying to find out just how much I really know."

"They were here to rob you," Shayne said flatly. "The reason I stopped by the hotel was to tell you that I've talked to the authorities and seen all the reports. As far as I can tell, Pat Harrington died an accidental death."

Baker shook his head. "I can't believe that. I asked some questions of the authorities myself before I ever came to see you, Mr. Shayne. Somehow, the people behind Pat's death got wind of that and came after me. That's the way I see it."

Shayne stood staring at him for a long moment, then lifted his right hand and rasped the thumbnail along his jawline. He nodded slowly. "Maybe. Maybe. But maybe they were just a couple of cheap hotel thieves."

Baker looked up, and his eyes met Shayne's. "Like you say, maybe. But what if they weren't?"

Shayne heaved a long sigh. He hadn't really wanted to get involved in this case in the first place, and now it looked like it just wasn't going to let go. There was something to what Baker said, as unlikely as Shayne considered the possibility that the man was right.

"All right," Shayne said. "We'll make it official. You give me a check now, and I'll have my secretary fix up a contract and send it over to you."

"You mean you're taking the case?"

"That's what I said."

Shayne looked around at the disheveled room while Baker wrote out a check. Maybe by carrying this case further he would be wasting his time and Baker's money. But maybe not.

"What are you going to do next?" Baker asked as he handed over the check.

"Go back and start from the beginning. You said Harrington was down here doing some work for the Coast Guard. Do you know where?"

"He was staying at a place called Hawkins Key. There's a Coast Guard station there."

Shayne nodded. "I know the place. It's about an hour south of here." He picked up his hat from the floor and gave Baker a curt nod. "I'll talk to you later."

He was out the door before Baker could say anything else.

AFTER A QUICK STOP BY THE OFFICE TO TELL LUCY TO prepare a contract for Baker, Shayne headed south. It was just past the middle of the morning by now, and the heat of the day was building. There was still a cool breeze off the ocean, though, and Shayne enjoyed the feel of it blowing in his face. For a moment he remembered his hastily-formed plans for the day, then put them out of his mind with a rueful grin.

He was going to spend his time fishing for a murder, instead.

The drive through the Keys was pleasant enough. It was noon when Shayne's Buick rolled off a causeway onto Hawkins Key. He had looked for the site of the fatal accident on the way down, but the broken guard rail had been repaired and there was no sign that a man had died there. Now Shayne was looking for the Coast Guard station. The Key wasn't one of the bigger ones: it only took him a few minutes to locate his destination.

There was a fence around the cluster of low white buildings. Beyond them, Shayne could see the docks where a couple of cutters were moored. He pulled through the open gate in the fence and parked in front of the largest building.

A seaman at a desk inside the door pointed him toward the office of the station commander. Shayne rapped knobby knuckles on the door marked Captain N. Simms, then opened it and walked in.

Inside, behind a desk almost as cluttered as Will Gentry's, a slender black man with a neat moustache looked up at Shayne. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"I hope so," Shayne said as he stepped into the office. "You're the station commander?"

"Captain Ned Simms." The man stood up and extended a hand across the desk.

Shayne took it. "My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a detective from Miami."

A sudden grin broke out on Simms' face. "I've heard of you. Sit down, Mr. Shayne, and tell me how I can help you."

"I'm looking into the death of a man named Pat Harrington," Shayne said as he settled onto a straight chair in front of the desk. "I believe he was down here doing some work for you."

The smile had left Simms' face at the mention of Harrington's name. He nodded solemnly. "That's right. Pat worked with us here for a couple of weeks. He was a damn good communications man, and I hated to hear about his death." He looked quizzically at Shayne. "I thought that his death was ruled as accidental. Is there some problem with his insurance or something?"

"It's nothing to do with insurance," Shayne told him. "There seems to be some question about whether or not Harrington was murdered."

"Murdered?" Surprise was evident on Simms' face and in his voice. "The man ran through a guard rail and into the ocean."

"Accidents can be faked. I've seen it happen."

"Well, sure, but still . . . Do you mind telling me just what your interest in this is, Mr. Shayne?"

"I have a client," Shayne said. "I'm being paid to make sure the accident really was an accident."

"I see." Simms stood up and turned to a window that overlooked the docks.

Shayne took advantage of the pause to look around the office. There were several framed certificates on the walls, as well as a couple of photos of Coast Guard cutters with their crews standing on the dock beside them. Two metal filing cabinets stood in one corner. It was a typical military office.

Simms looked back at Shayne. "I'll tell you whatever I can, Mr. Shayne," he said firmly. "I liked Pat, and if somebody killed him, I don't want them getting away with it. I really don't think I can tell you much that'll help, though."

"Can you start by telling me what he was doing for you?"

Simms leaned against the desk. "Sure, there's nothing secret about that. You know that one of our main duties is combatting the drug traffic up and down the coast."

Shayne nodded but didn't say anything.

"One way we try to catch smugglers is by listening in on their radio signals. They know that. So one of the things they do is try to jam the airwaves, scramble their communications, anything to keep us from listening in. They seemed to be getting a little ahead of us technically lately, so we brought Pat down here and told him to think like a smuggler. We told him to come up with everything he could to keep us from listening in . . . and then come up with a way around it. Do you know much about radio, Mr. Shayne?"

"I can turn one on," Shayne grunted. That was understating the case, but he was a novice compared to men like Pat Harrington.

Simms smiled. "Then I won't get too technical. Pat did what we wanted him to do. The project was completed successfully. I said goodbye to Pat . . . and that was the last time I saw him." Simms grimaced at the thought of what had happened next.

"Harrington didn't get into any trouble down here?"

"What kind of trouble could he have gotten into?"

THE WHEELS OF SHAYNE'S BRAIN WERE RAPIDLY CLICKING over. This new information that had been brought to him by Landers ran directly counter to what Captain Simms had told him. Simms had claimed that nothing was troubling Harrington. But it was easy to see why Simms might not have noticed the same things that Landers had. Simms was the station commander and had been in charge of the project that brought Harrington to Florida. Landers was a technician, much more likely to have gotten down to brass tacks and worked directly with Harrington. It stood to reason that Landers would have had more opportunity to spot Harrington's troubled attitude.

And the fact that during his first week here Harrington had gone out on the cutters several times gave Shayne something else to grab onto. But he needed more information.

"The times that Harrington went out on the cutters—were you along?" Shayne asked.

"Yes, sir. There were three times, and I was on board each time."

"Do you remember if anything unusual happened on any of those occasions?"

The speed of Landers' answer showed that he had already given some thought to that same question. "Twice we checked out some boats we thought might have been smuggling drugs. We stopped them and searched them but didn't find anything. I know the owners have been implicated in drug smuggling before, though, so I think they were just lucky not to be carrying when we stopped them."

"What about the third time?"

Landers shook his head. "Just a routine patrol. We towed in a charter boat with a broken-down engine, but that's all."

"How common is that?"

"Happens all the time. Helping out boaters who are in some sort of trouble is probably the main thing we do on routine patrols."

Unconsciously, Shayne's left hand strayed up and tugged on the lobe of his ear. Like it or not, drug running was the biggest cottage industry in Florida. If the two boats that had been stopped and searched by the Coast Guard were owned by people who had been involved with drugs before, the chances were good that they still were.

But what could a civilian like Harrington have seen that would worry him? What could he have seen that eventually got him killed?

All Shayne could do now was cover the ground, do the legwork that comprised the majority of any detective's work. He said to Landers, "I don't know what your regulations say, but could you give me the names of the other boats involved in those three patrols, the ones you stopped and the one you towed in?"

Landers looked dubious for a few seconds, then said, "I guess it wouldn't be bending the rules too much. I liked Pat. He knew what he was doing."

Landers either had a good memory, or he had looked up the information before following Shayne away from the Coast Guard station. He gave Shayne the names of the three boats in question and even had their home ports available. The charter boat was the only one that operated out of Hawkins Key; the other two were from Fort Lauderdale and Hollywood. Shayne jotted the information down in his notebook as his steak arrived, then asked the young seaman to order something and join him.

"No, sir, I've got to get back to the station." Landers was a little more at ease now, but he was still worried about letting a civilian in on what he had consider the private affairs of the Coast Guard. "If somebody did kill Pat, I hope you find them," he said as he stood up from the table.

"I'll find them," Shayne promised.

He watched Landers' rigid back as the young seaman left the restaurant. This was an unexpected development, all right. For the first time, he had something more to go on than Baker's hunch. Looking at the facts of the case objectively, Shayne had to admit that it still looked like Harrington's death was an accident, plain and simple, but now at least he had confirmation that something was bothering Harrington before he left Hawkins Key.

The steak was good, the potatoes cooked just right. Feeling a little better about the way the day was going, Shayne paid his bill and left the restaurant. The waitress had told him how to get to Carling's Marina, and he turned the Buick in that direction.

The charter boat that had been towed in by the Coast Guard while Harrington was present was somewhat unoriginally called the *Beachcomber*, and its home base was Carling's Marina, on the southwest side of Hawkins Key. The boat's owners also operated the marina, according to Landers. Shayne didn't really expect to find out anything valuable there, but it was the closest; he would check on the other two boats after he got back to Miami.

THE MARINA WAS LOCATED ON A SMALL COVE RINGED with palm trees. A nice spot, Shayne thought as he drove into the parking lot. There were several docks and a large building that housed the office and a combination bar-cafe-bait shop. Shayne spotted the *Beachcomber* tied up at one of the docks, but it was the only boat in evidence. Two cars and a pickup were parked next to the building.

Shayne went inside through a plain wooden door and found himself in the same kind of dim, rustic bar that you could find all over south Florida. A window unit on one side of the long room spewed out cold air; shades were drawn over the other windows. Fluorescent signs emblazoned with the names of different beers hung behind the bar and provided most of the illumination. There were booths along the wall opposite the bar, and a door at the far end of the room led into the cafe. The bait shop was further on, then the office at the other end of the building.

A young couple sat in one of the booths, and two men were perched on stools at the bar. Behind the bar was a woman in a light blue tee-shirt and jeans. As Shayne walked in, she turned a ready smile in his direction.

"Hi. What can I get you?" she asked.

Shayne settled onto one of the barstools, several seats away from either of the other customers. "Martell, if you've got it," he said with an answering grin.

"Honey, I've got everything I'll ever need behind here."

That was probably the truth, Shayne mused. The woman was in her early thirties, with a mane of dark hair and a lush figure that strained the fabric of the shirt and jeans. Her green eyes had laughter in them, and her whole attitude was one of provocative sensuality.

She came up with a snifter from somewhere under the bar, splashed cognac into it, and added a glass of ice water on the side without even asking. Shayne nodded in approval as he sipped the amber liquid.

"Now," the woman said, leaning forward on the bar so that the thrust of her breasts was emphasized even more, "you don't look like the type to just stop in here for a drink. What else can I do for you?"

Shayne decided to pass up the obvious retort and said, "I'm looking for the owner of this place."

"You're lookin' at one of them," she said. She held out a hand, and when Shayne took it, her grip was cool and surprisingly strong. "I'm Lois Carling. My husband Jake and I own the marina. He's in the office if you want to talk to him, too. Or will I do?"

"You'll do," Shayne said.

Her smile got wider.

Thinking that he'd better get this conversation started on the right track, Shayne went on, "Do you know a man named Pat Harrington?"

The smooth skin of Lois Carling's brow furrowed in thought. Then she shook her head. "I don't think so. He from around here?"

"No, but he was passing through the area a while back. I thought you might have run into him."

"Can't say as I did. If he was anything like you, though, I wouldn't have minded. Running into him, that is."

Shayne heard a footstep behind him, and then a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. "Somethin' I could help you with, mister?" a voice growled.

Shayne glanced over at the owner of the hand and the voice and knew without being told that this was Jake Carling, co-owner of the marina and husband of the luscious flirt behind the bar.

"I was just asking about a friend of mine," Shayne said in a level voice. "Fella named Pat Harrington. Know him?"

Carling shook his head, which was covered with short brown hair and sat like a bowling ball on top of his thick neck. He was wider rather than tall, but there was no fat on his body.

"Never heard of him," Carling said. "And who the hell are you?"

"Name's Shayne. And I'd appreciate it if you'd move that hand."

The two men locked eyes. Shayne was taller and had quite a bit more reach, but there was an air of barely suppressed power and savagery about Carling. Shayne thought he could take the man if he had to . . . so long as the bar's other patrons didn't pitch in. Regardless, though, he didn't like being grabbed, and he was going to have to do something about it if Carling didn't let go.

Carling's hand fell away from Shayne shoulder. "No offense, Shayne," he said in a still-surly voice. "And I still don't know this guy you're lookin' for."

"You've got no manners, Jake, you know that?" Lois said icily. "I was just having a pleasant conversation with Mr. Shayne here, and you come in acting like I was peddling it on the street."

Carling's lip lifted in a sneer and he started to say something, but he thought better of it and turned away. The feeling of tension in the room lifted to a certain extent when he walked through the door into the cafe.

"Now, about that friend of yours . . ." Lois said to Shayne.

"He was down here doing some work on a civilian contract for the Coast Guard," Shayne said. "He told me he was on one of the cutters one day when they pulled your boat in."

Memory flared in Lois's eyes. "Sure, I remember that. Damn engine conked out on us, caught on fire. That was a scary day. Not that we were in any real danger, but still I was glad to see that Coast Guard cutter coming up."

"But you didn't meet Pat Harrington?"

"Nope, not that I remember. And I remember that day pretty well."

"Well . . ." Shayne finished his cognac, followed it with the ice water. "Thanks anyway. I didn't mean to cause any trouble between

you and your husband."

"No trouble. Jake's just an old bear." She ran her eyes over him. "Besides, you look like you might be worth a little trouble."

Shayne grinned at her, paid for the drink, and left the marina with her drawled "Ya'll come back, honey," floating after him.

Logically, he thought he could cross off this lead and concentrate on the more likely ones that would take him back to Miami. There had been something about Jake Carling, though, something that Shayne didn't like . . .

The man was jealous, probably with good reason, and he was unpleasant. But that was no reason to suspect him of being involved with a murder that might not even be a murder.

Still, before he had driven five miles, Shayne knew he was being followed.

V

THE TRAILING CAR STAYED WELL BACK, BUT TRAFFIC was fairly light and Shayne had years of experience at spotting tails. He kept the Buick's speed constant and didn't try to pull anything fancy, but his mind was moving at top speed.

Jake Carling was the most logical suspect to be back there in the following car. Carling had also had time to make a phone call and set someone else on Shayne. If it was Carling or one of his friends, there were at least two reasons to choose from why he would be trailing Shayne. He might want to continue the trouble from the bar over his wife . . . or he might know more than he claimed about Pat Harrington. He might be worried about the fact that someone was investigating Harrington's death.

Either way, Shayne didn't want to force the issue just yet. He would wait it out and see just what his follower had in mind.

The car stayed about the same distance behind him all the way into Miami, closing the gap some only when they entered the city and traffic became heavier. Still, whoever it was made no move to actually catch up to Shayne.

Shayne drove on past his office without stopping. He wanted to see Will Gentry again and check on the owners of the two boats that the Coast Guard had stopped while Harrington was along. Baker's hotel was on the way to police headquarters, though, so Shayne thought he might as well stop and tell Baker the results of his trip down to the Keys.

He didn't want to lead the trailing car right to Baker, though. It was time to do something about the situation.

In the middle of a block, Shayne suddenly swung the Buick into an alley without signalling or using his brakes. It was close, but he knew the place, knew he would have room for the maneuver. The trailing car was three vehicles back, and Shayne thought with any luck that his move might have gone unnoticed. He trod down hard on the gas and sent the Buick scooting through the alley to a parallel street.

When he turned back onto his original route a few minutes later, he was behind the other car, doing a little trailing of his own.

He made a mental note of the license number and then took a good look at the car itself, a mid-sized, late model sedan that was totally innocuous in its appearance. One man was inside, and Shayne could tell from the shape of his head that it wasn't Jake Carling.

One of Carling's friends, then . . . or somebody else?

The other car sped up, the driver realizing by now that Shayne was no longer in front of him. Shayne grinned. The guy would look back sooner or later.

He did, and then the car surged forward with a renewed burst of speed. Shayne hung on right behind him, taking satisfaction from the way the tables had been turned.

The other man drove recklessly as it became apparent that Shayne wasn't going to be ditched easily. The two of them whipped onto a broad, tree-lined boulevard, and Shayne decided it was time to bring this chase to a close.

He might have done just that if an elderly gentleman in a fifteen-year-old car and a twenty-year-old straw hat hadn't pulled out in front of him at the next intersection.

Shayne slammed on the brakes and the Buick screeched and rocked to a stop. The old man stopped, too, in the middle of the intersection and looked at Shayne in total surprise. Beyond the unexpected blockade, the other car was careening around a corner and out of sight, and there was nothing Shayne could do about it but curse.

The old man finally shrugged his shoulders in apology and moved out of the way, but it was too late. The car Shayne had been following was gone, and with it some possible answers.

SHAYNE TURNED AROUND AND DROVE BACK TO BAKER'S hotel. The man from South Carolina was in his room, and he greeted Shayne eagerly.

"Did you find out anything?" he asked.

"Not much," Shayne grunted. He dropped his hat on a small table and sat down. "I talked to the Coast Guard commander on Hawkins Key. He didn't know of anything that would indicate Harrington's life

was in danger. One of the seamen said that Harrington was worried about something, though. I'm still checking some leads, trying to find out what might have been bothering him."

"Leads? What kinds of leads?"

"You leave that to me. That's what you're paying me for." Shayne stood up. "I'll be in touch, though, and I'll let you know if I find anything concrete."

"I'd appreciate it." Baker was holding up well, but the strain of waiting was visible on his face.

Shayne nodded, settled his hat on his red hair, and left the hotel room. As he went back to his car, he was repeating the license number of the vehicle he had chased so that he wouldn't forget it. He hadn't told Baker about that part of the case, since Baker hardly needed any more to convince him that something fishy was going on.

As for Shayne, he was becoming convinced, too. This hadn't smelled like a serious case at first, but now his gut was starting to say otherwise.

"Back again, huh?" Will Gentry grunted as Shayne strolled into his office a few minutes later.

"I need you to run a plate for me, Will, and I could use whatever information you have on these two guys." Shayne handed over the piece of paper on which he had written the names of the men who owned the boats in question.

Gentry raised an eyebrow. "Blythe and Sweet? I've heard of 'em. A couple of real vicious characters, despite their names. Been running drugs off and on for years."

"The Coast Guard stopped their boats a while back and searched them. Didn't find anything."

"Bad luck. You can bet that both of them are still involved in the racket. I haven't heard anything to indicate different."

Shayne nodded. "That's what I figured. Now about that license number?"

"You'd think you could find somebody besides the Chief of Police to do these errands for you, Mike," Gentry grumbled as he wrote down the number. He picked up his phone and got hold of the appropriate department.

"A rental," Gentry said a few minutes later when he hung up. "Rented by somebody calling himself Scott Bradford, with an address over on the Beach. Don't bother heading over there, though. It's a phony. I had the boys check that, too."

Shayne nodded. "I didn't figure whoever it was would give his right name. The car was rented here in Miami, though?"

"Yeah. Yesterday morning."

This news put a different angle on things. If the car had been rented in Miami over twenty-four hours before, by someone giving a phony name, then it was unlikely the man was connected with Jake Carling. Shayne had to admit that it could have been coincidence that his trail was picked up where and when it was. And there were the two men who had attacked Baker in his hotel room to consider. For a case that had started out all answers and no questions, this thing was getting complicated.

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said as he stood up. "I'd better get back to work."

"You're not going to tell me what it's about, are you?" Gentry demanded. "Even though I've done all the hard stuff for you!"

"You'll know what it's all about as soon as I do, Will," Shayne promised. "Maybe."

"Yeah, maybe. That's gratitude for you."

Shayne grinned and ducked out of the office while Gentry was still muttering under his breath.

LUCY HAMILTON WAS STILL AT HER DESK IN THE FLAGLER Street office when Shayne got back there a little later. Before Shayne could say anything, she inclined her head toward the door of his private office. He knew the gesture; someone was waiting inside to see him. Most visitors had to wait in the outer office if Shayne was gone. He wondered how this one rated the special treatment.

"Did you find out anything, Michael?" Lucy asked in a soft voice.

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "I'm not sure yet, Angel. Maybe. Who's the visitor?"

"The Navy has come calling."

Shayne grinned. "Not the whole fleet, I hope."

"Just one captain. But he insisted on seeing you. He doesn't seem too happy with you, Michael. What did you do to get the Navy mad at you?"

"I don't remember sinking any ships lately . . . "

He had begun the day by wanting to go fishing, then this case involving the Coast Guard had come up, and now a Naval captain was waiting to see him. Everything seemed to be revolving around water today. Shayne wondered if this new development was tied in with all the others.

"Guess I'd better see what he wants," Shayne said, then opened the door and stepped into the inner office.

The captain had been sitting in the chair in front of the desk, but at Shayne's entrance he stood, back stiff, and ran cold eyes over the big

detective. "Mike Shayne?" he asked.

"That's right." Shayne returned the stare.

The captain wore his uniform well. He was tall, blond, and broad-shouldered, and he looked every bit the dashing young officer. And like Lucy had said, he wasn't happy about something.

"I'm Captain John Stafford," he introduced himself without offering to shake hands. "I'm here to see about—"

"Pat Harrington's death," Shayne cut in and finished for him. He was rewarded by a flash of surprise in Stafford's eyes.

"That's right. How did you know?"

Shayne sank into the chair behind the desk and motioned for Stafford to sit down again. "Harrington was a former Navy man," he said. "And everything I run into today seems to tie in with his death."

Stafford sat down, back still rigid. "I did serve with Pat," he admitted. "In fact, I was his commanding officer."

"Then you were in Intelligence. Still are, I'd bet."

"*That* is none of your business."

Shayne sat forward, palms flat on the desktop. "Everything that's connected with Pat Harrington is my business," he said curtly, "at least as long as I'm investigating his death."

"His *accidental* death."

Shayne quirked an eyebrow. "Maybe, maybe not. I'm starting to revise my thinking on that subject."

"That's why I'm here. I want you to put an end to your investigation, Mr. Shayne. I hope that's stated plainly enough."

Shayne felt a surge of anger but suppressed it, at least for the moment. "And what makes you think I'd drop a case on the say-so of a man I've never met before?"

"I've done some checking on you, Shayne," Stafford said. "You've cooperated with the government before."

"When I had a good reason to.. Give me a good reason." Shayne paused, then said sharply, "Like maybe you're conducting your own investigation and don't want a civilian interfering with it?"

"I don't have to tell you anything—" Stafford began.

"You know, I would have caught up with you if that old man hadn't pulled out in front of me," Shayne said with a lazy grin. "You got lucky there."

He could tell by the angry flush on Stafford's face that the shot had gone home. "Look, Shayne," the officer snapped, "I can go to the police if I have to and get you pulled off of this."

"I'm not so sure about that. I'm a licensed private investigator going about my business in a lawful manner."

"That doesn't matter when national security may be involved!" Stafford caught himself as soon as the words were out of his mouth and looked annoyed with himself for saying as much as he had.

"Oh, so there's more to this than just looking into the death of a man who once served under you."

"I didn't say that. Dammit, Pat Harrington and I were friends. We pulled each other out of some tight spots."

For the first time, Shayne heard genuine emotion creeping into Stafford's voice. "I can understand that feeling," he said quietly. "I think we're on the same side, Captain, if you'll just unbend enough to admit it."

Stafford took a deep breath. His uniform cap was in his hands, and he turned it nervously for a moment before saying, "All right. Maybe you've got a point." He met Shayne's eyes. "I admit I followed you from Hawkins Key. I was down there looking into Pat's accident and I found out from Captain Simms that you were doing the same thing. I'll bet John Baker hired you, didn't he?"

"The identity of a client is confidential."

"Yes, but Baker was always the type to get carried away. Who hired you doesn't really matter, though. The important thing is that you bow out and let me handle things."

"I don't think I can do that," Shayne said slowly.

"I'm here officially, Shayne. I wasn't joking when I said that national security could be involved."

"*Could* be. I know Harrington worked on classified material when he was in the service, but if he *was* murdered, the killing might not be related to his past at all.

Stafford nodded. "Granted. But the possibility still exists that his Navy career does figure in, and in that case, it's my responsibility."

Shayne stood up, tired of dealing with men whose whole existence revolved around rules and regulations, rather than getting things done. "I'm on the case," he said flatly. "And I don't think you can get me off of it."

Stafford stood, too, and locked angry gazes with Shayne. "We'll see," he barked. He turned on his heel and strode out of the office.

Shayne went to the connecting door and watched with a grin on his face as Lucy jumped slightly when Stafford slammed out. She glanced at him.

"Are you sure you didn't sink any ships?" she asked.

VI

EVEN THOUGH SHAYNE HAD TALKED TO BAKER ONCE AL-

ready this afternoon, now he had something else to discuss with the man. Baker wasn't in his hotel room, though, when Shayne got there. He checked with the desk clerk.

"You're Mr. Shayne? Yes, I've got a message for you from Mr. Baker."

Shayne unfolded the slip of paper that the clerk handed over and read it with a grunt. Baker had gone down the street to a nearby bar for a drink. Shayne nodded his thanks to the clerk and left the hotel.

The bar was within walking distance, so Shayne legged it with his long stride. As soon as he pushed into the dimly-lit interior of the place, he spotted Baker sitting alone in a booth.

Baker looked up at him in surprise. "Mr. Shayne! I figured I'd be back at the hotel before you came around again. Glad I left a note anyway."

Shayne signalled to the bartender and slid into the opposite side of the booth from Baker. He ordered cognac from a short-skirted waitress. "I've got something to ask you," he said to Baker when the girl had left.

"What's that? Something new on the case?"

"Maybe. Does the name John Stafford mean anything to you?"

Baker's eyes widened. "Captain Stafford? What's he got to do with this?"

"You do know him then?"

"Sure. He was Pat's commanding officer. Nice guy." Baker frowned. "Why are you asking me about him?"

"Because he's mixed up in this, too," Shayne told him.

"Captain Stafford?" Baker seemed to hardly believe what Shayne had just told him.

"He's conducting his own investigation for Naval Intelligence. He wants me to butt out."

Baker leaned forward. "Then that confirms what I told you," he said excitedly. "Pat was murdered because of the work he did while he was in the service."

Shayne held up a hand. "Wait a minute. I'll admit that's a possibility, but he could have been killed for some totally different reason." He grimaced. "We don't even have a shred of solid evidence yet that his death wasn't an accident."

"If it was an accident, then why did those two guys jump me in my room? Why did that sailor say Pat was worried? Why would somebody like Captain Stafford be investigating unless there was some reason to believe Pat was murdered?"

Shayne inclined his head. "You've got a point," he admitted. "I

think Harrington was murdered, too. But thinking it and proving it are two different things."

The girl brought his drink then, so the conversation came to a brief halt. Then Shayne said, "I'd better get back to work."

"What's next?"

"More leads to check out," Shayne told him shortly. He could see the eagerness and enthusiasm in Baker's face. He knew that if he gave the man an opening, Baker would want to come along and take an active part in the investigation. And that was something Shayne didn't need.

"Are you parked up by the hotel? I'll walk back with you."

THE TWO MEN LEFT THE BAR AND WALKED OUT INTO THE late afternoon. Shayne turned to his right on the sidewalk, Baker at his shoulder, and started toward the hotel.

There was a flat *whap* in the air beside his ear.

Shayne threw himself to the side, into Baker, and both of them went down. Baker let out a surprised yelp. He started to get back up, but Shayne grabbed him and held him down with his left hand. His right hand dove under his coat and came up with his shoulder-holstered pistol.

"Stay down, dammit!" Shayne barked. "Somebody just took a shot at us!"

Shayne's eyes searched the street as he hugged the sidewalk. There was no good cover here, but there hadn't been any more shots, either. Passersby had seen the two men hit the pavement and were now starting to come cautiously forward. Shayne lifted his head, came up into a crouch. When the first shot missed, the sniper had probably taken off.

There had been no sound of gunfire, which meant some kind of silencer. Shayne looked around, spotted the place on the building where the slug had chipped the brick. He holstered the pistol and stepped over to the wall, then dug in the brick with his pocket knife. A moment later, the flattened, distorted bullet dropped into his palm.

Baker had gotten up by now and joined him. His face was white and drawn. "Somebody was really shooting at us, weren't they?"

"That's right," Shayne told him bluntly. He held up the spent slug. "One shot with a silenced rifle. I was probably the target—" He glanced at Baker. "—but you might have been."

Baker swallowed hard. "Me?"

"You. You're the one who was determined that Pat Harrington was murdered. You called in a private detective to check it out. And somebody's toes got stepped on."

Baker glanced around nervously. "Shouldn't we get inside?"

Shayne shook his head. He had done some rough lining-up, based on the slug's impact point and the place where he and Baker had been standing at the time of the shot. The most likely place for the shot to have originated was a large parking lot down the street. It was a self-serve lot with no attendant on duty, with plenty of cars parked there for the sniper to use as cover. Shayne was sure that whoever it had been was long gone now.

He tossed the slug up in the air and caught it. "We'll drop this off with the cops," he said. "May come in handy for comparisons later on if we get our hands on a suspicious rifle."

"We?"

"You're coming with me," Shayne grunted. Even though he had just been thinking that an amateur was the last thing he needed or wanted involved with this investigation, he had a feeling that Baker would be safer tagging along with him. And it was bad for business having a client blown away.

Baker didn't argue. Shayne could tell that he was glad to be going along. He was still shaken, which was understandable. Getting shot at was sometimes part of Shayne's job, but you never really got used to it. For someone like Baker, it had to be really upsetting.

BAKER GOT OVER IT, THOUGH, AND WAS EXCITED TO BE A part of the investigation. They stopped at police headquarters and Shayne turned the bullet over to the lab boys, deciding not to bother Will Gentry this time. Then they headed north to check out the two boats owned by the suspected drug smugglers.

Shayne had to tell Baker about that part of the case, and he decided it would be easier to fill him in completely. He started with the trip down to the Keys and went over everything that had happened since the morning. Baker listened avidly, then said, "Once you get started on a case, you really stay busy, don't you?"

"Sometimes things start to move fast," Shayne told him. "you've got to hang on and stay with it if you're going to keep up."

Baker talked most of the way to Fort Lauderdale, telling Shayne about Pat Harrington and their days in the service together. Shayne had to admit that Harrington sounded like a heck of a guy, and Baker's desire to find his killer was infectious. Shayne didn't like murderers, no matter who the victim was.

Finding the marina where Blythe's boat was moored was no problem, but finding the boat or Blythe was. Nobody had seen Blythe for over a week. Shayne got back in the Buick and told Baker what he

had found out.

"Pat's accident was six days ago," Baker mused. "Do you think this Blythe was planning on killing him and went into hiding ahead of time?"

Shayne rubbed his jaw and pondered for a moment, then said, "Disappearing just draws attention to yourself. If Blythe was planning on killing somebody, he'd try to keep everything else as normal as possible. There's something not right about this, but I'm not sure what just yet."

They drove to Hollywood as the sun dipped under the western horizon and had a little bit more luck this time. Sweet's boat, the *Kentucky Belle*, was moored right where it was supposed to be.

Shayne parked the car and walked out onto the marina's dock, Baker at his heels. Shayne would have preferred that Baker stayed in the car, but the man had insisted on accompanying him.

They stopped beside the boat, and Shayne called out, "Hello, on board! Anybody home?"

There was movement in the gathering shadows of the boat's cabin. "Who's that?" a man's voice asked.

"I'm looking for Sweet," Shayne replied. He put a foot on the gunwale of the boat and got ready to step over.

There was a surprisingly loud click. "Stay where you are," the voice in the shadows rapped. "Sweet's not here."

Shayne stayed still, well aware that a gun was trained on him. "When will he be back?" he said, hoping that Baker had enough sense to remain motionless, too.

"He won't be back." The voice was flat, cold, final.

"Are you sure about that?"

A low laugh. "As sure as anybody can be. This boat has . . . changed hands."

Shayne grinned. "Sweet's profile was a little high, wasn't it? Too high to suit some people?"

"You could say that."

Baker fidgeted, and Shayne felt a cold finger trickle along his spine. "Maybe you can answer a question for me?" he said quickly to keep the attention of the man in the shadows focussed on him.

"Maybe."

"How long since the uh, change in ownership took place?"

"A week. I don't see any problem in telling you that."

"All I needed to know," Shayne assured him. Carefully he put his foot back on the dock.

"If I do see Sweet again—unlikely though that is—who do I tell him

was asking about him?"

"Nobody he knows." Shayne wanted to walk calmly back down the dock to the car and get out of there before nerves—or Baker—got them shot.

"I need a name, friend," the voice said, but it was definitely unfriendly now.

Shayne felt anger gnawing at his insides. He knew what the man was, and he would have like nothing better than to get on that boat and make him eat his own gun. But he had a client with him, and getting Baker out of here in one piece had to be the first consideration.

"My name is Mike Shayne," he said harshly. "Your boss has probably heard of me, even if you haven't."

There was a soft chuckle. "I've heard of you. And I've got friends who wouldn't mind if I gave you a message for them right now."

"Go ahead," Shayne breathed, cold hatred making him forget about Baker just for a moment.

After a long minute's silence, the voice said, "No, I don't think so. I don't think it would be worth it. So long, Shayne."

Shayne nodded, backed away from the boat. "Get the hell back to the car," he snapped over his shoulder to Baker. He kept his eyes on the boat all the way back down the dock.

"What the hell was that all about?" Baker asked as they drove away. Even in the gloom, Shayne could see that he was pale again, just as he had been after the shooting in Miami.

"Well, we know what happened to Blythe and Sweet now," Shayne said. "They had been in trouble before, their boats were being stopped as a matter of routine by the Coast Guard, and they were more of a liability than an asset to the people higher up. So there were some changes made."

"You mean they were killed?" Baker demanded.

"That would be my guess," Shayne grunted, the anger still burning inside him. "That guy on the boat might have even been the triggerman. He sounded like the type."

"I thought you were going to walk right into his gun for a minute."

Shayne smiled ruefully. "So did I. I've had run-ins with the Mob before and will again. We're not friends."

Baker drew a deep breath. "You lead an interesting life, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne just kept smiling.

"What now?" Baker asked after a moment.

"We stop somewhere and grab a bite to eat, then head south," Shayne told him.

“South?”

“I thought of something a while ago. Jake and Lois Carling run a charter service, and if their boat was out on the water the day the Coast Guard had to tow them in, they must have been out there for a reason.”

“They had a charter,” Baker guessed.

“That’s right. I want to know just who had their boat chartered. None of our other leads are panning out, so we’ll come at it from another angle.”

Baker nodded. “So we’re going back to Hawkins Key?”

Shayne grinned. “We’ll make a detective out of you yet.”

VII

CARLING’S MARINA WAS DARK AND DESERTED-LOOKING when Shayne and Baker got there, which was an unexpected break as far as Shayne was concerned. Full night had fallen, and Shayne had figured that the bar would be doing a good business. He saw a Closed sign in the window as he killed the Buick’s engine, though, and knew he couldn’t waste this opportunity.

“Stay here,” he said quietly to Baker. “I’ll see if we can’t find out what we need to know.”

“You mean you’re going to break in there?” Baker asked.

“Don’t worry about what I’m going to do,” Shayne told him. “Just stay put.”

He slipped out of the car and walked toward the building. He headed for the end where the office was located; that was the most likely place for records to be kept.

The door into the office was locked. Shayne knocked softly on it, just on the chance that someone was inside, but he didn’t get any answer. He took a ring of keys from his pocket and began trying them on the lock. Just having the keys in his possession would have been enough to get him arrested in some places, but he had found over the years that they were invaluable.

It took him just over two minutes to get the lock open. He pocketed the keys and then pushed gently on the door. It swung open, revealing an even deeper darkness inside.

Shayne delved into his pockets again and brought out the little pen-light he always carried. Partially shading its beam with his hand, he moved into the office. The little light gave him all the illumination he needed to find his way around. He went first to a cluttered desk and pawed through the stacks of papers until he found a heavily-penciled desk calendar. He flipped the pages back to the date in question.

Albeck was printed in a coarse hand across the space for that date.

Shayne turned the calendar pages back like they were, then moved to a battered filing cabinet in the corner. Again, luck was with him. Within seconds he had found a copy of a bill made out to Kevin Albeck, giving a Miami address. The name was vaguely familiar to Shayne, and even though he couldn't quite place it, he knew where to go to find out just who Kevin Albeck was.

Slowly, quietly, he closed the file drawer and straightened up. He clicked the penlight off, familiar enough now with his surroundings to know that he could find the door in the darkness. It was time now to head back to Miami and find out what Kevin Albeck might know about Pat Harrington.

All the time he had been in the office, Shayne's ears had been attuned for any out-of-place sound that would warn him of impending trouble. Now, as he stepped to the door, he didn't have to listen closely to suddenly know that something was wrong.

"Mr. Shayne!" John Baker yelled at the top of his lungs. "Mr. Shayne!"

With a curse, Shayne sprang out the door and looked toward the Buick. Even in the pale moonlight, he could see the empty front seat and knew that Baker hadn't followed his orders. The yell came again, and now Shayne was able to pinpoint it. It was coming from the docks.

Shayne broke into a run, yanking out his pistol as his feet pounded the gravel. He saw a figure moving unsteadily toward him out of the shadows and knew it must be Baker.

Shayne grabbed the man, and Baker let out another yell. "Quiet!" Shayne hissed at him. "It's just me. What the hell's going on?"

"I saw somebody down by the docks," Baker said excitedly, gesturing toward the water. "I thought I'd go down and see who it was—"

"I told you to stay in the car," Shayne bit off.

"I was afraid they'd come up to the office and catch you inside there," Baker babbled. "I thought I'd stall them, give them some story about being lost . . . "

Shayne's eyes were intently scanning the dock area. He couldn't see any movement, but there were thick shadows under the palm trees, and he suddenly felt awfully exposed.

He tightened his grip on Baker's arm and pulled the man over behind a particularly thick-trunked palm. "What happened then?" he snapped.

"I started down there . . . then I couldn't see the person moving around any more. I thought they had gone . . . Oh, Lord . . . then I

tripped."

"Tripped?"

"Over the body. I tried to catch myself . . . My foot slipped . . . in the blood . . ."

Baker's voice was ragged, stunned. Shayne pushed him roughly against the tree and said, "Stay here. And goddamn it, I mean it this time!"

HE LEFT BAKER THERE AND WENT TOWARD THE DOCKS at a quick walk, his pistol clutched tightly in his big fist and ready for use. His eyes, more accustomed to the dark than Baker's, picked out the dark shape sprawled on the gravel where one of the docks began.

Shayne knew even before he knelt beside the shape that it was no use. The body was that of a man, and there was a puddle on the ground around his head that was dark in the moonlight. Shayne gripped his shoulder, rolled him over, and grimaced at the sight of the broad grin that had been slashed into the soft flesh of the throat.

Jake Carling's open eyes stared sightlessly up at the stars.

Shayne pressed the eyelids down, then stood up with a sigh. This pretty well confirmed that Pat Harrington's death was tied in with whatever he had seen the day the Coast Guard towed in Carling's boat. And somebody was getting damn worried now that Harrington's death was being investigated.

Shayne heard the tiny crunch of gravel moving under someone's feet.

He threw himself to the side as a gun blasted in the shadows.

The slug cut through the air over his head as he landed hard on the gravel. His reaction had been instinctive; he had known without even thinking about it that the sound had come from a position that Baker couldn't have reached, not without Shayne knowing.

And anybody else who was moving around down here in the shadows wasn't likely to be friendly, not with a throat-cut corpse on the ground . . .

Shayne rolled as another bullet kicked up gravel a few inches away. He spotted the muzzle flash this time and fired back. The first two shots he triggered off were wild, more for the sake of distraction than anything else, but then he reached his goal, two large metal trash barrels. He dove behind them, then came up in a crouch and squeezed off two more shots.

A bullet came out of the night and spanged off one of the barrels. Shayne ducked, then fired again. He still wasn't in a very good position, he knew. He was pinned down here since there was nothing else to offer cover anywhere close by, and he also had Baker to worry

about. He looked toward the tree where he had left Baker, and was glad to see that there was no sign of him. Shayne hoped he was behind the tree and had sense enough to stay there. There were businesses and houses not too far from the marina; someone was bound to hear the shots and call the cops. Shayne thought that once the howl of sirens began closing in, the gunman in the shadows would take off.

He didn't have to wait for that, though. More shots exploded, but this time they came from a different direction. Shayne's first thought was that Baker had gotten hold of a gun somehow and was joining in the fight, but he discarded that idea as slugs peppered the trees. Judging by the rate of fire and the steady, accurate rhythm of the shots, the newcomer was a professional.

Shayne heard a car door slam, then the squeal of rapidly departing tires. The noises came from beyond the trees. The killer must have had a car stashed there, Shayne thought. As the roar of the engine died away. Silence fell on the marina. Shayne reloaded quickly, not yet fully convinced that the trouble was over.

"Shayne? Are you all right, Shayne?"

The voice calling to him was familiar, and Shayne suddenly placed it. He stood up from his cover as a tall figure emerged into the clearing around the marina.

"Thanks, Stafford," he said.

Captain John Stafford nodded curtly. He wasn't in uniform now, but instead wore dark clothes that blended in with the night. "I thought I recognized you," he said. "What's happened here?"

Shayne jerked his head at the body behind him. "Jake Carling's been murdered. He owned the charter boat that was towed in by the Coast Guard one day when Harrington was along. Still think Harrington's death has something to do with national security?"

"Until I've got concrete proof otherwise, yes." Stafford suddenly spun around, his gun coming up.

Shayne leaped forward and grabbed his arm, bearing it back down. "Hold it!" he snapped. "It's just Baker."

Baker was coming toward them at a trot, evidently convinced that the shooting was over. When he saw who the newcomer was, he stopped in his tracks and snapped to attention. "Captain!" he gulped.

Stafford shook his head wearily. "Baker," he said. "At ease, Baker, you're not under my command any more."

"Yes, sir, I mean no, sir." Baker was clearly confused by everything that was going on here. First he had stumbled over a body, then everybody started shooting, and now Stafford showing up out of nowhere . . .

"Well, I'm glad our investigations crossed paths again when they did," Shayne said to the Intelligence man.

"I'd prefer that they didn't cross paths again," Stafford said as he slipped his pistol back into its holster at the small of his back. "By that I mean—"

"I know what you mean. You still want me to drop the case."

"That's right."

Shayne shook his head. "I can't do that. I appreciate the help here, but I'm on this case until it's over."

"I may not be around next time to bail you out."

"Bail me out . . . !" Shayne pulled in the reins on his temper. He jabbed a blunt finger in Stafford's direction: "Next time the positions may be reversed. Remember that."

"We'll see." Stafford lifted his head. He had heard the same thing Shayne was now hearing: sirens. "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't mention me to the cops," he said, then without waiting for an answer, faded off into the shadows again.

"That man likes to make assumptions," Shayne said with a grin.

"What do you mean?" Baker asked.

"Like assuming that you and I are going to wait around for the cops to get here." Shayne started toward the building at a fast walk. "Come on. It'll still be a few minutes, and there's something we have to check."

Baker trotted to keep up with Shayne's long strides. "Was that Jake Carling?" he asked breathlessly.

"That's right. And something's been worrying me ever since I saw who it was. Where's his wife?"

The office door was still open, and the connecting doors inside the building weren't locked. It only took Shayne a couple of minutes to cover the place, and there was no sign of Lois Carling. A tiny ball of something cold was rolling around in his stomach as he rejoined Baker at the car.

"She's not here," Shayne told him. "But the cops will be pretty soon. Let's get moving."

When they were back on the highway and speeding away from the marina, Baker asked, "Do you think something's happened to Mrs. Carling?"

Shayne's eyes didn't leave the road. "That's what I'm worried about. Whoever was shooting at us could have had her stashed in the car." One of his hands left the wheel to reach up and tug at his earlobe.

"Stafford was sure Johnny on the spot, so to speak."

"Well, he *is* investigating the case, too." Baker paused a moment,

then glanced at Shayne in comprehension. "You think he's got more to do with it than he's saying?"

"Let's just say I'm not sure yet what to make of him."

Shayne left it at that and fell silent. After a few minutes, Baker said, "I'm not sure I like running out like that, not staying to talk to the police."

"Talking to the police would probably take all night in a murder case," Shayne told him. "We've got things to do."

"What?"

"I know now who had the Carlings' boat chartered that day." Shayne grinned, his face gaunt and savage in the glow from the dash lights. "We've got one stop to make, then we're going to pay a late night visit to Kevin Albeck."

VIII

THAT ONE STOP WAS AT THE MIAMI *DAILY NEWS*. AS Shayne had suspected, Timothy Rourke was able to fill him in on Kevin Albeck.

"New money, and lots of it," the lanky reporter said, leaning back in his chair and propping his feet on his desk. Shayne hadn't been surprised to find Rourke in the City Room of the *News*, even this late at night.

"Albeck's a wheeler-dealer, primarily in real estate," Rourke went on. "Started out fairly small, but he built up in a hurry. From what I hear, he's always on the lookout for a way to make a buck."

"Interesting," Shayne mused.

"Maybe." Rourke took his feet off the desk and leaned forward. "What's your interest in him, Mike?"

Shayne grinned: "I just came across his name in connection with a case I'm working on. Nothing spectacular, just routine."

"One of Mike Shayne's cases, just routine?" Rourke snorted. "I'll believe *that* when I see it."

"You know if there's a story involved, you'll be the first one I come to, Tim."

"Sure. And once a year Fidel Castro dyes his beard white and delivers toys to good little children all over the world."

Shayne chuckled, glad that he had left Baker downstairs in a coffee shop. The place was busy enough that Shayne thought he would be safe, and Baker didn't have the years of experience in dealing with Rourke that Shayne did. With his newsman's instinct, Rourke would have tried to pry the story out of Baker, and Shayne didn't think Baker would have been able to resist.

He thanked Rourke, walked out of the City Room while the reporter muttered at his back, and collected Baker downstairs. Rourke had confirmed the address they had for Albeck and also provided a picture of him and his wife, a stunning young blonde. Their home was in an exclusive residential neighborhood, and Shayne headed in that direction. It was after ten o'clock now, and the traffic on Miami's streets was starting to thin just a bit.

"You think this man Albeck might be able to tell us something about Pat?" Baker asked.

"I don't know," Shayne replied. "But according to Carling's records, Albeck had the boat chartered the day the Coast guard towed them in. Maybe he saw something that Carling and his wife didn't. For that matter, the Carlings could have been lying to me earlier today."

"Do you think that maybe Jake Carling remembered something that didn't mean anything at the time but did once you had talked to him? Maybe he tried to blackmail somebody with that knowledge and got killed for his trouble."

Shayne shot an admiring glance at Baker. "You really are starting to think like a detective," he said. "That's one possibility. But it's not the only one."

Shayne didn't say anything else on the drive to Albeck's house, but his mind was working in high gear. He went back over everything that had happened since Baker appeared in his office that morning, considering all the theories he could think of and noting the strengths and weaknesses of each one. So far, there was no clear-cut answer, but in Shayne's mind, a pattern was beginning to emerge.

MANY OF THE HOUSES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD WERE dark when Shayne and Baker arrived; the air of the place was one of tranquility. Shayne found the street he was looking for and let the Buick coast to a stop in front of the house that belonged to Kevin Albeck.

The house was large, two-storied, set behind a big, well-cared-for lawn. The second floor was dark, as was the front downstairs, but Shayne saw lights at the rear as they came to a stop.

"Somebody's still up," he said, easing his door open. "Stay here."

"You might need help," Baker said.

"I'll yell if I do, don't worry," Shayne assured him.

He followed a flagstone walk across the front yard. The bell next to the door was illuminated. Shayne leaned on it, heard chimes going off somewhere inside the house.

He waited a minute, then rang the chimes again. Still no answer.

Craggy red brows drawn down in a frown, Shayne rapped his knuckles on the panel, but that proved as ineffective as the chimes. There didn't seem to be anyone home.

But when he reached down and tried the knob, it twisted easily and the door swung open an inch.

Shayne slipped the pistol out from under his coat.

He knew not to disregard the mental warning bell that was going off in his head. Holding the gun ready, he pushed the door all the way open and stepped into an ornately decorated entrance foyer. The house was quiet and still and had a curiously empty feeling to it, but Shayne was willing to bet that it wasn't empty.

A hall opened up in front of him and led toward the back of the house. Light shone at the far end. Shayne catfooted down the corridor, already suspecting what he would find at its end.

The door at the end of the hall led into a large den. Shayne paused just inside the doorway and looked around.

The first thing he saw that was out of place was a long, bare, beautiful leg, protruding from behind a big desk.

Shayne walked across the room and looked behind the desk. His face tightened, and grim trenches appeared in his lean cheeks.

The woman lying behind the desk was undoubtedly Kevin Albeck's wife. She was wearing a short silk gown, and her blonde hair streamed out around her head.

There was a bullet hole in the center of her forehead. One thin trickle of blood had seeped from it and dried there on the smooth skin.

Shayne wheeled around and checked the rest of the room. There was no sign of Kevin Albeck in the den, but another room opened off of it, a library filled with expensively bound books that looked unread.

Albeck was in the library.

He must have been running, trying to get away, because the slug that had ended his life had taken him in the back of the head. He had fallen face down into the soft carpet, but Shayne doubted that he had felt that. He had probably been dead by the time he hit.

Shayne took a deep breath. This house wasn't empty, just empty of life.

The pattern was becoming clearer to him now. There had been four murders counting Harrington's. And the only connection between the four deaths was the fact that a Coast Guard cutter had towed in a disabled charter boat.

That was important to someone. Someone was cleaning house.

Shayne's face was still gaunt and grim when he slid behind the wheel of the Buick. Baker looked over at him and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Albeck and his wife are dead," Shayne said as he started the engine. "Both of them were killed with a single bullet to the head. We're dealing with somebody who knows what he's doing."

"A professional killer?"

"Maybe . . ." Shayne said slowly. "I've got to call this in."

He took the radio telephone from under the dash and soon heard the ringing of Will Gentry's home phone. Gentry answered after a moment, sounding gruff and sleepy.

"It's me, Will," Shayne said. "I've got a couple of murders to report."

"What? What the devil are you talking about, Mike?" That was all it took to shock Gentry fully awake.

"Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Albeck," Shayne told him, then gave him the address. "I found them a few minutes ago."

"Are you still there?"

"No, I've got business, Will." Shayne forestalled the explosion he knew was coming by saying, "I've got at least one more murder to stop, that's why I didn't hang around. I'll be in as soon as I can give you the whole story."

"Dammit, Mike—"

Shayne broke the connection.

"Where are we going?" Baker asked after a moment of tense silence.

"South," Shayne said flatly. "We're going to pay one more visit to the Keys."

IX

THERE WAS A WEARY ACHE IN SHAYNE'S SHOULDERS AS he drove off the causeway onto Hawkins Key. It was after midnight now. Baker had come into his office a little over sixteen hours before, and this was his third trip to the Keys in that time. He had also been chased, punched, and shot at on two separate occasions since then.

Shayne had already decided that he would be damn glad when John Baker went back to South Carolina.

"Somebody's going around killing the people who were on hand the day the *Beachcomber* had to be towed in. So far Harrington, Jake Carling, and the Albecks have been eliminated. Lois Carling may be dead by now, too, for all we know. That leaves the crew members of the cutter."

Baker had nodded at Shayne's explanation, then asked, "You think they'll go after the Coast Guard? Wouldn't that be more dangerous?"

"We're dealing with a killer who's panicking," Shayne had told him. "That kind doesn't always do the thing that would be smartest in the

long run."

He drove straight to the Coast Guard station. Though he doubted that Captain Ned Simms would be on duty at this time of night, he might be at the barracks. If not, then maybe Shayne could find someone who could tell him where to locate Simms. But it was important that Shayne talk to the captain tonight. A new idea had come to him on the drive down from Miami, and Shayne thought a visit to Simms might help to confirm it.

He was right about Simms not being on duty. A young seaman was monitoring the radio in the headquarters buildings, though, and he came to the locked front door in response to Shayne's persistent banging.

"Where can I find Captain Simms?" Shayne demanded as the seaman opened the door. "It's important."

The young man looked dubiously at him. "The captain's off-duty right now," he said. "You can see him in the morning."

"This is an emergency, son," Shayne told him tautly. "And it's official Coast Guard business. Now if you want to explain to the captain in the morning that you wouldn't cooperate with me . . ."

The seaman swallowed. "Well, if you're sure it's an emergency, I can call the captain—"

"Just tell me where he lives. Here at the station?"

The seaman shook his head. "He's got a cottage that he rents—Hey, just who are you, mister? I could get in trouble for this."

"My name is Mike Shayne," the big detective told him. "I'm investigating a murder case, and I talked to Captain Simms earlier today. Yesterday, it would be now. And dammit, I need to talk to him again." A hard edge crept into Shayne's voice, and the seaman must have decided to risk a chewing out from his superior officer.

"He has a cottage between here and town," the seaman said. "I'll tell you how to get there."

"You would have made a good officer," Baker told Shayne as they drove away from the station a few minutes later. "You have that tone of command in your voice."

"No thanks," Shayne said wryly. "Too many rules and regulations in the military for my taste."

IT TOOK THEM ONLY A FEW MINUTES TO REACH THE COTTAGE where Captain Ned Simms lived. It was small, tidy, and close to the beach, the type of place that tourists might rent for a month or two at a time. For a Coast Guard captain to be living there seemed a bit unlikely, but Shayne supposed that it was Simms' way of getting away

from his job.

There were lights burning in the cottage, and two vehicles were parked in front. One of them was a Coast Guard jeep.

Shayne recognized the other one.

The last time he had seen it, he had been trying to catch up with its driver—Captain John Stafford.

Recognition came to Shayne quickly enough that he didn't slow down in front of the cottage, but instead kept on driving down the road. He ignored Baker's questions and came to a stop several hundred yards further on.

"We'll walk back," Shayne said shortly. "Something's going on back there, and I don't want to announce our presence just yet."

They pushed the doors of the Buick shut with soft clicks, then started up the shoulder of the road. "Be as quiet as you can," Shayne hissed to Baker. He slipped his gun out of its holster.

The yard around the cottage was mostly sand, with a little grass struggling to keep a foothold, so Shayne and Baker were able to approach the little house without making any sound. There were shrubs beneath the lighted windows; so they weren't able to get too close, but the glass was open and they were able to hear quite well through the screens.

"I think the time has come for an accounting, captain," a voice said from inside.

"I agree, captain," another voice replied.

Shayne grimaced. He knew who the voices belonged to, but he still had to know the situation inside. Cautiously, he raised his head until he could see through the window.

Simms stood closest to the window, with his back toward Shayne. A few feet away, holding a gun tightly in his hand, was John Stafford.

Shayne was aware of Baker lifting himself so that he, too, could see, and then he felt Baker's fingers tightening on his arm. Baker had seen Stafford, had seen that the Navy captain was holding a gun on his Coast Guard counterpart.

Shayne shrugged off Baker's hand. He might have to make a move soon. Let Baker draw his own conclusions.

Inside the cottage, Stafford gestured curtly with the gun. "Get away from that phone," he growled at Simms.

"Sure. Take it easy, captain," Simms said, making an obvious effort to keep his voice calm and level. He moved two steps to his left, and Stafford started coming toward the window.

Shayne thought he would have to duck to avoid being seen, but Stafford's attention was suddenly elsewhere. A door opened behind

him, and he started to swing around in that direction as an agile form leaped into the room.

Stafford didn't make it. The barrel of the pistol in Lois Carling's hand slammed into his head.

Staggering, blood springing from the cut that the gun barrel had opened up, Stafford lost his balance and his pistol at the same time. He went down to one knee, tried desperately to surge back to his feet. But then Simms locked his hands together and smashed them into the back of Stafford's neck.

Stafford fell limply to the floor.

Shayne started to stand up, but instead he made a sudden grab at Baker, who broke into a run for the front door of the cottage. "Captain!" Baker yelled, not sure what was going on but determined to help Stafford anyway.

Shayne's grab missed. Baker hit the front door and knocked it open. Shayne cursed and swung back to the window. He squeezed off a shot that shattered glass and made Simms and Lois duck.

Then Baker was in the room, throwing punches at Simms. Simms warded them off and kicked Baker's feet out from under him. His right fist came around as Baker fell and landed just under Baker's jaw.

Baker's head snapped around and he hit the floor as bonelessly as Stafford had.

Shayne came through the door in a rolling dive and snapped off a shot at Simms. Simms dove for the floor as the slug cut the air close to his head.

"Drop it!"

Lois Carling's voice was cold and filled with deadly menace. Shayne shot a glance in her direction and saw her kneeling next to the still-unconscious Stafford. The muzzle of her pistol was pressed firmly against Stafford's temple.

There was nothing else Shayne could do. Baker's action had taken away all his other choices. And now it might well get them all killed.

Shayne dropped his gun.

Simms scooped it off the floor, then stood back at Lois' side. With two guns trained on him now, Shayne slowly stood up.

Baker moaned, shook his head, and rolled onto his side. He lifted his eyes to the scene before him. Shayne was a captive, Stafford was still out cold on the floor, and Simms and Lois looked ready to shoot all three of them.

"What happened?" Baker asked.

"You wanted to find out who killed Pat Harrington," Shayne said. He nodded toward Simms and Lois. "There they are, right there."

X

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT . . . UNDER less deadly circumstances.

The *Beachcomber* cut smoothly over the waves, headed out to sea. Lois Carling was at the wheel, while Simms stood in the doorway of the cabin, facing out onto the deck and holding an automatic pistol. The muzzle was pointing steadily at Shayne, Baker, and Stafford.

Stafford was shaking his head, still groggy from being knocked out. Blood had dried on the cut opened up by the gun barrel.

"I wish somebody would tell me what's going on," he said in a low voice.

Simms smiled and gestured with the pistol. "Get Shayne to explain it to you. He thinks he's got it all figured out."

"Maybe I do, Simms," Shayne said. "I know one thing for sure. You're about the lowest bastard I ever met. You sold out, mister. Somebody met your price and you said to hell with duty."

"This job was worth more than I'd make in ten years with the Coast Guard," Simms said.

"Yeah." Shayne's tone was sardonic. "Especially when you start knocking off your partners in the bargain."

Baker had been strangely quiet ever since the brief battle at Simms' cottage. He had said hardly anything while they all rode to the marina in Stafford's rented car. Then, at gunpoint, he and Shayne and Stafford had been taken aboard the *Beachcomber*. He knew what would happen when they got far enough out to sea, just as Shayne and Stafford did.

Now, though, he said in a firm voice, "I want to know why."

Shayne looked at him and saw very little fear. Baker seemed more angry than anything else. Shayne understood the feeling.

"Do you mind?" he asked Simms.

Simms shook his head. "I'd like to know just how much you did figure out."

"It all goes back to the day the cutter towed this boat in. You were in command of the cutter that day, Simms."

Again, Simms nodded. "Right so far."

"I've been thinking back on that day. Somebody on the cutter spotted this boat. You hove to beside her and asked what the trouble was. The Carlings told you that they'd had a fire, that their engine was out."

Shayne paused, and Simms said, "Keep going."

"I'm guessing a little bit on this part, but I think they also told you that their radio wasn't working. That was so they wouldn't have been

able to call for help. Of course, there was nothing really wrong with the radio; that was just part of the set-up. Just like there was nothing really wrong with the engine and the fire was just for appearance's sake. All for show, all to provide a reason for the Coast Guard to have to tow the boat in."

Stafford nodded his head slowly. "That made for a nice cover, all right," he interjected. "A pretty smart plan, Simms. It should have worked."

"It would have worked if Pat Harrington hadn't been such a nice guy," Shayne went on. "But Pat, being Pat, decided he'd help out by taking a look at the supposedly useless radio. He went aboard the *Beachcomber* before any of you could stop him—at least before you could stop him without looking too suspicious—and saw that there was nothing wrong with the radio. Maybe that got him wondering if all the rest of the story was a lie, too. And he asked himself why anybody would go to that much trouble to set up a lie. You saw him worrying about that over the next few days, Simms, and you got scared. You didn't want him asking questions."

"Not me," Simms said emphatically. "The stuff was already ashore and delivered. The pay-offs had been made. I wanted to just let it ride." His voice lowered so that they could barely hear him over the wind and the water. "Lois thought differently. And Jake did whatever Lois wanted."

Shayne nodded. "I can see that. So Jake and Lois got rid of Harrington. I'll bet Jake wanted a bigger share for that, too."

Simms glanced over his shoulder at the cabin, not so cocky now that he saw how accurately Shayne had put things together. Shayne could also tell that there was some definite friction between Lois and Simms. But they were in it together, in way too deep to back out now.

"So Lois decided to get rid of Jake, since he was getting troublesome and hard to handle," Shayne continued. "More money to go around that way, after all. Or maybe the two of you came to that conclusion together. Of course, once you'd decided that, it was easy enough to go on to the next step: if you got rid of the Albecks, too, there would just be the two of you left and you could have it all."

"Who are the Albecks?" Stafford asked.

"Unless I miss my guess, they set the whole thing up in the first place and financed the buy," Shayne told him. "They were young and newly rich and on the lookout for any quick way to add to their pile. A monster drug deal with a surefire way of getting the stuff into the country would be just the ticket. All they needed was a charter boat and a Coast Guard captain who could be bought off."

"Drugs?" Baker said. "All this was about drugs?"

Shayne waved a hand at the boat. "They probably had this thing loaded to the gills. Lots of money to be made. Lots of money to be split between the only two left alive." Shayne grinned at Simms. "I'd watch my back if I were you, Simms. Lois may decide you're expendable, too."

Simms shook his head. "Forget it, Shayne. You're not going to stir up trouble and get away with it. In fact, you don't have the time to do much of anything."

"You shot at us this afternoon when we came out of the bar," Baker accused. "Mr. Shayne had been down here asking questions so you decided to get rid of us. But how did you know to send men to my hotel room before that?"

"What?" Simms looked puzzled. "We didn't bother your hotel room, man."

"Then . . . then who were those men who attacked me?"

"Burglars," Shayne said dryly. "Hotel thieves, just like I told you they might be. They didn't have a damn thing to do with Harrington's murder. But if they hadn't helped convince me that you were on to something, I would have sent you home and Simms and Lois would have gotten away with it."

"No," Stafford said flatly. "I was investigating, too. Like you, Shayne, I was in this case for the wrong reasons, but I had already gotten suspicious of Captain Simms here." Contempt dripped from the Navy man's voice. "That's why I paid him a visit tonight."

"And because I barged in, we're all going to be killed," Baker said softly. "It's my fault."

"Now don't worry about it, honey," Lois Carling said from behind Simms. "We've all got to go sometime."

Simms moved over and let her come out onto the deck. She held a pistol, also, and Shayne didn't doubt that she knew how to use it.

"We're far enough out now," she told Simms. "By the time the sharks get through, there won't be enough left to wash ashore."

"I still don't like all this killing," Simms said in a low voice.

"No, but you like the money it brings, don't you? And you like me. This'll be the end of it, Ned, don't worry." She lifted the gun. "We've covered all the bases now. All we have to do is let things settle down a while, then you resign your commission and we go somewhere and start spending all that lovely cash."

"No." John Baker put his hands on his knees and pushed himself to his feet. "No."

Lois swung her gun toward him and her mouth twisted in a snarl.

"Sit down, old man," she spat. "You'll be dead soon enough."

Shayne exchanged a quick glance with Stafford.

"No," Baker said. "You're not going to get away with killing my friend and all those other people."

"Sit down!" Lois screamed at him.

Baker started walking toward her.

"Shoot him!" Simms yelled.

Shayne came off the bench in a low dive as the gun in Lois's hand cracked.

He heard the blast of Simms' pistol, felt splinters stab into him as the slugs chewed the deck around him. Then he was crashing into Simms' legs. His hand groped for the pistol, found it, closed over the hot muzzle. Shayne shoved it upward and wrapped his other arm around Simms' thighs. Both of them went sprawling on the deck.

Lois fired twice more, but Shayne didn't have time to worry about where the bullets were going. All the anger that had built up in him exploded. He got hold of Simms' wrist and twisted savagely. The pistol clattered on the boards of the deck, and then Shayne was astride the man, pounding punches down into his face as hard as he could. Simms' head bounced up and down off the deck. Shayne kept hitting him, again and again.

Stafford grabbed his arm and stopped him eventually.

Shayne took a deep breath and stood up. Simms was out cold, blood covering his face. Shayne looked at his hands in the moonlight. They were bloody, too, but it had come from Simms, not him.

"He's not going to be bothering us for a while," Stafford said with satisfaction. "But I didn't think you wanted to kill him, either."

"I wanted to," Shayne breathed. He looked at Stafford. "Thanks."

ABRUPTLY, HE BECAME AWARE OF WHAT ELSE HAD HAPPENED while he was fighting with Simms. Like her partner, Lois Carling was stretched out on the deck, unconscious. Stafford glanced at her and rubbed his knuckles. "First time I ever hit a woman," he chuckled.

"That's not a woman," Shayne told him. "That's a killer."

He knelt beside Baker, who was propped up against the side of the boat. Baker had his hands pressed to his side. There was a dark stain on his shirt, but it didn't seem to be spreading.

"I got shot," he told Shayne.

"So I notice," Shayne said. He looked over his shoulder at Stafford. "Should be a first aid kit in the cabin. See if you can find it."

"I knew I had to do something," Baker said. "It was my fault, all of it. If I hadn't gone running into that house . . . if I hadn't come down

here determined to stir up trouble—”

“If you hadn’t, a couple of vicious killers would have gotten away.” Shayne gently took Baker’s hand away from the wound and cut the shirt so that he could see what he was doing. The moonlight was strong and bright, and he saw right away that the wound was more messy than serious. “You’ll live,” he said with a grin.

“Shayne, here’s that first aid kit.” Stafford tossed the kit over from the cabin doorway. “I’ll get this boat turned around and started toward home.”

“Right.” Shayne went to work on Baker, quickly disinfecting the wound and bandaging it. The slug had gone through the muscle cleanly, and Shayne didn’t think it would cause any trouble once they got back to land and could get Baker to a hospital. Then, what was left of the night would be spent mopping up the details of this case.

Shayne stood up, helped Baker into a sitting position on the bench, and said, “Just take it easy now.”

“Okay.” Shayne started to turn away, but Baker stopped him by saying, “You know, Mr. Shayne, we cracked this case in less than a day. Looks like we make a pretty good team.”

“Yeah,” Shayne grunted, suddenly suspicious, thinking that he knew what was coming.

“So I was thinking, if you ever considered taking in a partner in your agency, I might be available . . .”

Shayne sighed. It looked like it might be a long boat ride back home.

NEXT MONTH

Mike Shayne returns in another full-length novella:

DEATH TOPS THE CHARTS
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DON’T MISS IT!

He couldn't explain it, but the hate was there, showing itself in the newspapers and the criminal courts. The terrible thing was: there didn't seem to be any way to stop it!

The Ugliness at the Brierwood Lawn Bowling Club

by STEWART STREET

ALL THE WAY OUT TO BRIERWOOD THAT SATURDAY morning, Grandpa Harkennen scarcely spoke a word, just stared out the car window at the passing city landscape and spun the tree-shaped air freshener hanging from John Duncan's rear view mirror with a crooked index finger. When he did finally speak, it was more to break the stiff silence than to say anything of importance or to utter what was really on his mind.

“How is my daughter?”

“Gwen’s just fine,” Duncan said back to his father-in-law.

“And that grandson of mine? How’s Petur?”

“Fine, too, dad.”

“What is he now? Eight?”

“Seven,” John Duncan said. “He came home with a pretty nifty joke the other day.”

“Did he now,” said John Duncan’s grandfather, his tone becoming chipper for the moment. “What’s the joke?”

“It was a riddle,” Duncan answered. “Petur asked his mother if she knew what the momma firefly said to her son when he came home with a perfect report card.”

“And what did she say?” said Grandpa Harkennen, tittering just a

little, perhaps thinking how special it was that his tiny grandson was already grown enough to be remembering and telling jokes he'd heard in school. It was.

"The momma firefly said, 'Well, you're getting to be pretty bright for your age'."

"Firefly, I get it. Well, that's not too bad for seven years old, not too bad at all."

And then they fell back into the icy silence again. Duncan paid attention to his driving, refraining from any more forced conversation. His father-in-law would read its falseness immediately, the way collectors could tell false coins from true. He had been hurt badly today, all the seniors at Brierwood had, and idle talk wasn't going to wash the hurt away. It was vicious vandalism of a kind unknown by Duncan, a brand new type of criminality that was as callous and insensitive as mindless human slaughter with a gun.

They were less than a dozen city blocks from Brierwood now, a small well-kept neighborhood in the northwest quadrant of town, with pocket parks and bike trails and a public golf course and middle-income residents, who worked hard at their blue-collar jobs and mowed and trimmed their lawns and washed their cars on Saturday. Only now, one of them was hiding behind a mask of normalcy and respect.

And it hadn't escaped Duncan's attention that Brierwood had gained a kind of reputation of its own over the past few years. Three high-rise retirement homes had been erected there and a massive seniors' health care center besides and seniors were moving quietly and unobtrusively into the smaller homes and duplex units. It was hard to tell whether there was an imbalance of the elderly living in Brierwood. Duncan had never got that impression himself and the public presses and the media weren't calling attention to any imbalance.

NOW, AS THOUGH THEY SHARED SOME SPECIAL WAVE-length neither understood, Grandpa Harkennen said, with the finality of an axe falling across the neck of the condemned man, "They hate us, you know."

"Who hates you, dad?"

"Anybody's guess who they are. But I know who they hate. They hate old people."

"Nonsense. Nobody hates you."

"Oh, they hate us, all right, you can be sure of that. They aren't an organized group and they don't pay dues and they don't have meetings. But all the same, they hate us. Like the Kennedy-haters."

"The what?" Duncan asked.

"The ones who hated them Kennedy boys and killed them all, except for that last one. And the first one, Joe, the one who died in the war. All that money, all that handsomeness, all those fine schools, all those beautiful wives and children."

Duncan made no comment. The turn-off for the Brierwood Lawn Bowling Club was just ahead and he didn't want to miss it.

"But what the Kennedy-haters hated most," his grandfather was going on, "was the inherited wealth. That's the one kind of money most people can't stand, money people don't lift a hand to get. So they can run off and play at politics and touch football and drink lemonade all day long."

"Well, there may be more behind Kennedy-hating than that," said John Duncan, without elaborating, because frankly speaking, he'd always admired the Kennedys.

"Just like there's a group that hates Kennedys, there's a group that hates old people. We get yelled at and threatened and avoided and isolated and abused and even mugged and worse. And, son, I can't even tell you why."

Nor could John Duncan explain it to his father-in-law. And yet it was true. These days, the abuse of the elderly seemed on a rise that knew no ceiling. At Toth Investigations, where he had worked for the past nine years, not many cases of elderly abuse and neglect came to them. But the newspapers and criminal courts records were full of instances of the physical and psychological abuse of older people, replete with the hopelessness and fear that was always there. And when the elderly weren't being abused by aides or nurses or their own families, employers were abusing them by not hiring them or firing them on trumped-up reasons and con men were bilking them in simple confidence schemes even a child could recognize. Thieves took pension checks from their mailboxes and robbers noted them as they came from social security offices the first of every month and followed them to their banks, or merely waylaid them long before then and forged signatures to the stolen checks. *"How do I hate thee?"* John Duncan whispered to himself as he drove them into the parking lot next to the lawn bowling club, *"let me count the ways."*

THE LOT WAS ENCLOSED BY A CHEST-HIGH CHAIN-LINK fence, which then wrapped itself around the confines of the club. The bowling green itself was partially hidden from view by a one-story, cinderbrick building of modest proportions in which were housed an office, a snack bar and separate locker rooms and showers for male and female club members. Beyond the windows of the snack bar, a raised

decking of oak made a nice patio from which members and guests could watch the bowling matches from small tables or canvas deck-chairs. Duncan knew the club's layout and many of its members on sight from his several visits as his grandfather's guest. But although he had a good sense of the landscape and the people at the club to make him feel comfortable and at ease, none of that could prepare him for the wanton destruction that was to meet his eyes.

Where Duncan had before looked out upon an immaculate, rolling green as fine and taut as new felt on a billiard table, he and Grandpa Herkennen now saw something resembling a field that had been plowed by a maniac. Dozens, perhaps even hundreds of holes had been dug in the turf, deep gougings some of which looked to be two and three feet across. Sod was strewn everywhere and in some places there were only the gaping holes, meaning large pieces of turf had been borne away by the vandal—or vandals—in their escape. Pickaxes, too, had been wielded to scar the green with long, snaking trenches in a crazed serpentine of destruction. A beautifully manicured bowling green had been turned into a minefield and there was no doubt in John Duncan's mind that he was standing before madness.

At his ear, John Duncan heard his father-in-law say, weakly, "Whoever did it took a lot of the turf with them. They wanted to force us to reseed, to tear out the whole green and start from scratch. There'll be no more play here this summer. Maybe not next summer, either."

Duncan was still too stunned to speak, to make at least a response of condolence. He was wondering if a single person could have done so much destruction. It was possible, but that person had to have been strong and in the physical good shape of an athlete. And even if he'd worked with the speed and frenzy of a madman, this madness would have taken hours to manufacture.

As they paused just inside the gate, an elderly male emerged from the cinderbrick building and headed their way, his face cut in a smile that was trying to be more valiant than tragic but failing at it just a little. A white, handlebar moustache flowed out gracefully on his upper lip and a thin breeze caught in his fine, white hair and tossed it about in several directions. He wore a white windbreaker jacket with the name of the bowling club stitched on its left breast. So precise and erect was his bearing Duncan felt the old gentleman would have looked perfectly at home manning the flying bridge of a yacht or chairing a corporate board meeting.

He came to a halt in front of Grandpa Harkennen and extended his hand. "Petur, you old Finn, sorry you had to come out and see all this. I tried calling you at home, but you were out."

"I was down seeing my son-in-law at his office," said Harkennen. "He drove me out. You haven't met him yet, have you?"

"I haven't had the pleasure, no," the white-haired man said, shifting his outstretched hand in Duncan's direction. "I'm Cyrus Greene, with an extra e."

"John Duncan," Duncan said, taking in his palm a firm grip that contained just the pressure in it he liked: one that bespoke a solid greeting, but not a test of strength. Like his own father-in-law's.

"Cyrus is our general manager and tournaments director," said Grandpa Harkennen. "Retired mailman. Didn't miss a day of work in thirty-five years."

Greene tried to stifle a blush, but he was only partially successful. "Oh, hell, Petur, I *had to* show up every day. With that kind of attendance record building, my supervisor could never train a sub-carrier. I was the only one who knew the route."

Grandpa Harkennen gestured out towards the bowling green, where a half-dozen elderly men and women were wandering slowly around the potholed green. To Duncan, they looked a bit like mourners pausing before tombstones in a graveyard.

"Some of them came out," said Harkennen.

"I couldn't stop them," said Cyrus Greene. "When I got here this morning and found the damage, I started phoning all the members to cancel their matches. But, of course, then I had to explain why. They just wanted to see for themselves, I expect."

"Did you also call the police?" John Duncan asked.

"My son-in-law is a private investigator," explained Grandpa Harkennen. "He's with Toth Investigations. Downtown in the big Tri-Tower Building. Toth is the biggest in the state. They do mostly your prestigious corporate work and your government surveillance and jobs like that, so anything you can say to me you can say in front of John."

Duncan did a wince inside. Here was a proud father-in-law about to offer his son-in-law's services without the son-in-law's consent, when he already was up to his ears in work.

"He's got a degree in sociology. And another degree in criminology. Coos Bay College. Maybe you heard of it. He specializes in governmental and institutional crimes."

"Well, the police don't seem all that hepped-up to follow through on this thing," said a displeased Cyrus Greene. "They came out and took a report from me and old Settebello, my groundskeeper, but they did it with all the interest of a husband jotting down what his wife wants from the grocery. Didn't stay five minutes."

"John, he's taken a lot of accounting and economics and math,"

Grandpa Harkennen was continuing, as proud as ever. "You got to if you want to wade into governmental and white-collar crime. I'm sure he'd probe around the edges of this thing for you, Cyrus. Have it all cleared up in no time. Right, John?"

Duncan smiled a dog's dinner smile. This wasn't the first time Grandpa Harkennen had agentized himself to proffer his son-in-law's services and likely it would not be the last. He was still perceived by the older man as a combination of James Bond and a cold war Alec Leamas, with just a touch of Superman around the edges. Never mind that all he did at Toth was crank video cameras inside surveillance vans and administer and evaluate lie detector tests and voice analyzers on behalf of insurance companies, banks and governmental agencies. In this age of gadgetry and electronics software, there were no super heroes, only the trained, intense eyes of the professional watchers. While Phillip Marlowe rolled over in his grave, men like John Duncan quietly watched their charts and graphs and stress indicators, getting gum stuck to their shoes only when they went to the movies.

GRANDPA HARKENEN WAS STILL WOWING CYRUS
Greene with Duncan's credentials and expertise. "He was in Vietnam, you know. He went to Army Intelligence School in Maryland and then he was assigned to the 248th Military Intelligence Company, intercepting and monitoring Cong radio transmissions and flying reconnaissance missions over the DMZ. Yes sir, very dangerous, sensitive work . . ."

Duncan felt he ought to head off all this lionization at the pass. "I'd be happy to look into this incident if you like, Mr. Greene. If the police consider this to be just another bit of harmless vandalism, they won't pursue it at all. But everyone should have an advocate."

"We couldn't pay you," said Greene. "Reseeding, rolling, fertilizing and manicuring our green will take every nickel we have in our general fund. The Parks Department may let loose of a few dollars, but their funds were cut back last year by all those levy failures."

"Aw, keep your wallet on your hip, Cyrus," said Grandpa Harkennen in a gush of benevolence with Duncan's time and earning power. "They pay him like a king down there at Toth. He can dove-tail this work in between his other investigations at no charge."

"This is awfully good of you, Mr. Duncan. We want this person caught. We want a message sent out that seniors are tired and angry of being targets and victims."

"You know this may end in a cold trail, Mr. Greene. But I'll do my best. In the meantime, you can work up a list of names, addresses and

telephone numbers of all your lapsed members, excluding those who've left under amicable circumstances. Mail the list to me in care of Toth Investigations in the Tri-Tower Building as soon as you can."

"I'll get right on it, Mr. Duncan."

Duncan asked Grandpa Harkennen if he wanted a ride home.

"Think I'll stay here at the club a while. Console my disheartened friends, here. Maybe nose around and look for clues. You go on and get this investigation rolling, son."

"Just do me one favor, dad?"

"Sure, John."

"Don't touch or move anything which might be evidence?"

"Preserve the chain, as you private eyes say. You bet, son."

There were times when John Duncan felt his father-in-law knew his job better than he did.

ALEXANDER TOTH LIKED HIS INVESTIGATORS TO PUT IN 5½-day work weeks, even if that meant covering old ground in the field, or shuffling papers already shuffled by a dozen pairs of hands. And Toth checked the employee sign-in registers in the lobby of the Tri-Tower frequently to learn which of his investigators were filled with the company spirit and which were not. "If they never sleep at Pinkerton," Toth was always letting them know in his machine-gun memos, "then they don't even take forty-winks at Toth." Investigators at Toth who took that policy lightly weren't around very long.

John Duncan signed in at a little after one p.m., evaluated some stress analysis tests and then found himself thinking again of the senseless vandalism in Brierwood. In conjunction with that, he was also thinking of Tamara Wine, who had lofty, corner offices up on the forty-eighth floor. He wondered whether she was working on such a nice-looking Saturday, felt it was worth a shot trying and found her number in his card file. Tamara Wine was the best psychologist in the building and probably the best in town. Prosecutors and public defenders alike sought out her expertise for psychological profiles on at-large criminals and citizens charged with crimes. It was the rare occasion when her expert testimony was not upheld in court or failed to sway a jury's verdict one way or the other.

"John Duncan, yes I remember you," she was saying to Duncan a minute later over the phone. "You're with Toth, downstairs, aren't you?"

"That's right, Ms. Wine. I was wondering. Could you give me a few minutes this afternoon on a criminal matter?"

"Are you in the building now?" said Tamara Wine.

"Yes, I am."

"Can you come up now? I was just leaving for the day, but I guess I can leave my hat up on the rack for another fifteen minutes or so. Suite 4820. The door's unlocked. Just go right through the reception area. Gwen isn't on today."

"I'll be right up, Ms. Wine."

THE SATURDAY QUIETNESS IN THE BUILDING MADE THE elevator ride seem even longer than on the two previous occasions he'd sought consultation with Tamara Wine. On the third floor, Toth Investigations had its feet virtually on the ground. This was like hitching a ride on a space craft to Neptune.

Tamara Wine's reception area was as Duncan remembered it: too ferny to suit his own tastes, with the walls too abuzz with classy prints by Picasso and Rembrandt and the floors too deep in sink-to-the ankles carpeting. But many of her psychologically distressed clients had blue chips to spend on corrective therapy, so it didn't make much sense that she work out of a packing crate by the side of the road. And besides, she'd acquired this lofty, wise-owl's perch all on her own (her deceased father, a wealthy industrial kingpin and a big fan of Andrew Carnegie, had given most of his wealth away) and through hard work as well, so whatever trappings she wanted around her was her own business.

She was already seated behind her desk in front of those sweeping corner windows when Duncan entered the room, her trendy suit coat draped over the back of her chair, to indicate she was ready for business. There wasn't much nonsense to her, he had grown to learn. She had a pretty face, but made almost no attempts to flatter it with ticks of make-up. Her jet-black hair hung straight down to her squarish shoulders, stuff as fine-looking as threads of rare Oriental silk. He'd often wondered how beddable she was. Likely, not very. But then again, there was a lot of still water there.

Casting these pleasing diversions aside—it was Saturday after all—Duncan drove directly to the point about the vandalism at the Brierwood Lawn Bowling Club that morning, mentioning also that his father-in-law was a club member and thus, how he had learned of the incident.

When he was finished, Tamara Wine spent a minute mulling over what she had been told. From the oddly twisted expression on her face, John Duncan could tell a beach rock had just been upturned to reveal a species of creature that was both ugly and revolting.

"I think we can eliminate one category of suspects immediately and forthwith," she told him at last.

Duncan wanted to know which category that might be.

"Juveniles," said Tamara Wine. "This was elaborate vandalism, not the hit-and-run kind juvies undertake. Kids spray-paint slogans and cuss words on subway walls and bridge underpasses. They throw water bombs from apartment house windows. They knock top hats from the heads of bankers with snowballs. Juvenile vandalism is impulsive, quick and inexpensive.

"And another thing. You told me dozens of large pieces of sod were taken from the scene. So the club would be forced to reseed the entire green, which would put them out of action for almost a year."

"Does that suggest something?" Duncan said.

"It suggests some sort of vehicle had to have been involved to haul off that much sod. A flatbed truck, or a pick-up, perhaps. And tools. *Real workman's tools.* Tools, vehicles, and time. Do you see how elaborate a scheme like this becomes? No, you don't have juvenile criminals here, Mr. Duncan, you have some very mean and very nasty adults."

"Could only a *single adult* be involved?" asked Duncan.

"I wouldn't rule out the possibility," Tamara Wine said. "To do the destruction you say he's done—I mean, the sheer breadth and depth of it—he had to be at it two hours or more. But the bowling club is situated off the beaten path, far from any main highways and hidden in the trees. And it had no night security guard, or roving security patrol. Yes, the vandal or vandals could have taken their good, sweet time at it. Their only enemy was dawn."

John Duncan lit a cigaret and gave it three deep draws before he again spoke. "Well, we now know who we *aren't* looking for. Can you give me the psychologist's educated guess who we *are* looking for?"

The dark, female eyes sized him up from across the table, perhaps considering whether he could handle this much suppositional data, this much psychological brainstorming.

Her assessment of how much he could digest and fathom was favorable.

"Mr. Duncan, I can tell you what you *may be* looking for. I can preent you with possibilities, likelihoods, tendencies. I can point out an area and a group of rocks you might turn over. But I *can't* point you to the specific rock. Do you understand?"

"Just get me down to the beach, doctor, and I'll be grateful," John Duncan said.

"All right, then. Possibility One. The Stranger With Misplaced Rage. Someone has observed the lawn bowling club from a distance, as an outsider. He—or *she*—perceives a group of genteel, upper-class men

and women engaged in a dignified, British-like lawn game. The women are dressed in white pleated skirts and pretty sweaters and dainty hats. The men are stately-looking and elegant in cable sweaters and white slacks and white, cleated bowling shoes, perhaps even club blazers, with the club crest stitched to the breast pockets. Onlookers sit at tables dressed in their finery, sipping cool drinks and watching the games, their Porsches and Mercedes-Benz' parked in elegant rows in the club's parking lot . . .

" . . . only there is something wrong with this picture," Tamara Wine continued. "These lawn bowlers *are not* the idle rich politely engaged in private, restricted pleasures of a sunny afternoon. They're middle-income pensioners and retirees trying to ward off old age and loneliness with fresh air, sunshine and games with their friends. And the cars in the parking lot aren't Porsches and Mercedes, they're Fords and Chevrolets, some of which need new tires and others of which could stand tune-ups and new gaskets and valve jobs."

"He's misread the situation," said John Duncan.

"In spades. He might have checked it out more closely, only he's a long-range observer. He's entirely comfortable with his misperceptions. He's certain these are the idle rich, the Haves. And that's all a Have Not needs to know. His impulses rise one night, he's helpless to withstand the power of their bidding, and he rampages the club lawn, the one thing they revere. Without their bowling green, they can't bowl. And without their bowling, they have no reason to meet. The club is destroyed."

"If that's our man," said Duncan, "what are our chances of nailing him?"

"Slim and none," said Dr. Wine. "Remember, he's a total stranger with no tangible connection to the bowling club, only his rage against people he perceives as rich and privileged. You have all that turf hauled away, of course. Find him with the turf in his possession, on his property, and you have your vandal. But it's a bit like Hansel and Gretel and the trail of bread crumbs. That confiscated turf is your only connection to him."

"What's Possibility Two?" John Duncan wanted to know.

"A little nearer to home. He is an actual member of the bowling club. Or a lapsed member, or one who's been blackballed or shunned socially. This possibility is within your reach, because he isn't a vandal in flight. He's still around, gloating over his destruction, fully enjoying how he's paid them back for whatever's been done to him, real or imagined."

"The club's manager is already working on that aspect of it for me,"

Duncan told her.

"Good. We come now to Possibility Three, admittedly more outré than the others, but perfectly valid and possible just the same. You *may* be dealing with someone who is living in morbid fear of his own mortality."

"What?"

"Simply put, death terrifies them. Their *own* death. There exists a pathological group incapable of dealing with the reality of death."

"What would that have to do with vandalizing a lawn bowling club?" Duncan said.

"Bluntly put, they hate the elderly because old people are a constant reminder to them that they are closer to death today than they were yesterday. So many cases of the abuse and neglect of the elderly come right down to this pathological fear in the care-giver. Sounds whacky, I know, but I could walk to that bookshelf across the room and pull down a dozen recent volumes of proven case histories."

"So we may even be looking for a chronic abuser."

"That's a strong possibility."

"I'd like to get my hands on him in a back alley for ten minutes."

"I wouldn't rush to judgment so quickly," said Tamara Wine. "The fear of death is the most popular pathological fear next to standing up and speaking in public. And abuse, that's issued by degree and we're all a little bit guilty there. Take your own father-in-law, for instance."

"Petur?"

"You love him, of course."

"Of course," said John Duncan.

"Right now, he's in pretty good shape for a man of sixty, isn't he."

"Sixty-four," Duncan corrected. "Yes, he's in top shape."

"Healthy, independent and self-sufficient. But how will you treat him when his health begins to fail? When he becomes less lucid and forgetful? When he becomes infirmed and not quite so independent and self-sufficient as he is now? When he has to be moved out of his own apartment and into a rest home, or a center for the aged, or a sanitarium? True, you won't love him any less, but you may begin treating him differently. You may find yourself demanding and scolding and short-tempered and . . . yes, even abusive. It happens in the best of families, Mr. Duncan."

"I hope I'll always treat him the same."

"Don't be so sure until the time comes. Will he develop diabetes? Gallstones? How many insulin injections will you give him before your patience breaks and your compassion for him begins to waver?"

TWO MINUTES LATER, JOHN DUNCAN WAS RIDING THE elevator back down to his own offices. He had been given quite a lot more to think about than he'd half-expected. Tamara Wine had not only presented him with a good profile of a criminal, but she'd also forced him to confront how he felt about aging and family abuse and dispassion and neglect. He would watch for those signs now where they concerned his treatment of Grandpa Harkennen as he grew older—the unintended cruelties and slights, the cold indifference, the belittling scoldings, the full range of inhumanities, many of them still hidden and lying in wait.

When he stepped from the elevator, his father-in-law was there waiting for him outside the locked glass doors of Toth Investigations. He was waving a sheet of paper in the air and grinning up both ears.

"Cyrus was going to put this in the mail, but I told him it was only going to lay there like a dead fish until Monday morning, when you might want to strike with a hot iron."

It never ceased to amaze Duncan how mobile and rapid his father-in-law could be armed only with a city transit map and his Metro senior citizen's bus pass. There had been times when he had actually beaten Duncan to mutual destinations via an intricate network of bus transfers and mysterious shortcuts on foot.

"Only two former club members who might have axes to grind, son. What say we pop in on them before they get their lives back in order."

Duncan's mind's eye was seeing the work heaped on his desk and Alexander Toth's never-ending edicts on which birds got the worms and which were kicked from the nest. "You're going to miss Petur's peewee league hockey out at the Highland's Ice Palace," he told his father-in-law. "You've been going every Saturday for almost two years."

"And I feel a little bad about that, too, John. But when there's a criminal to be caught, it boils down to which we're more obligated to do. I think little Petur would understand."

So recent had been his conversation with Tamara Wine that Duncan was keenly alert to his father-in-law's sensibilities. Now, even overruling him seemed a subtle abuse of an elder.

Grandpa Harkennen was waiting. His eyes seemed to hold a plea, as though he stood to gain or lose something by Duncan's answer.

Finally, Duncan took the sheet of paper from his father-in-law's hand. "Well," he said to him, "let's get this task force in motion."

ABRAHAM MEEKER LIVED IN VICTORY HEIGHTS, A SEMI-squalid part of town where promises of urban renewal had been broken

ten years running. As a result, the row of brownstones along Prefontaine Street, where Meeker lived, were separated by vacant patches of rubble, the effect something like a row of teeth in the mouth of someone who had practiced poor oral hygiene and now had to endure the ugliness of intermittent extractions.

Meeker's membership in the lawn bowling club had been terminated because he'd slapped his female partner across the face during a match, an unforgiveable act he'd done twice previously. Five months had passed since his expulsion, but Duncan knew there was seldom a statute of limitations where the carrying of grudges was concerned.

The door to the Meeker flat was answered by a smallish woman whose pin-dot, fearful eyes seemed less devices for sight than places of hiding.

"Yes?" came the small voice. No hands moved to unlatch the door chain.

"Mrs. Meeker, my name is John Duncan. I'm a private investigator." Duncan tried to ignore the puffy, blue welt abloom beneath the woman's left eye, but could not. "I'd like to ask you a few questions, if that would be all right."

The wariness in the voice turned all at once deadly. "He hired you, didn't he."

"Who hired me?"

"My husband, that's who. He beats me up good and I have him arrested and now he's trying to get something on me from behind his cell bars. Maybe booze, maybe a boyfriend. Well, beat up is beat up. They took pictures. The police took pictures of this eye and even the bruises on my ribs. He can rot there now for all I care."

Duncan moved to get to the bottom line quickly now, because the woman's chest was heaving and she was on the verge of a crying jag. "When was your husband arrested, Mrs. Meeker?"

"Wednesday night," said the woman.

"And he's still in jail?"

She nodded. "Can you believe it, he actually *telephoned me* to bail him out, to bring down the money. I told him he'd just wasted a quarter."

John Duncan smiled and told the woman any further conversation wouldn't be necessary.

On their way to the home of the second former bowling club member, Grandpa Harkennen questioned Duncan's letting the woman off so easily.

"She might be lying, you know."

"She's got enough troubles. A batterer for a husband and now private detectives coming out of the baseboards at her. We'll check with the city jail's booking desk, find out when Meeker was booked and if he's still a registered guest. What about the second suspect? What's his name? Poughkeepsie or something?"

"Pocekaye. Big Greek fellow. He's a retired fruit peddler. Had a pretty big stall down at the public market up until about two years ago. One of those huge, mobile cranes was being used to work on a high-rise construction across the street from the market. It toppled and the crane's arm crashed through the market's ceiling right above Pocekaye's stall. He was buried in rubble and brick. Broken back, crushed sternum. Reconstruction surgery allowed him to walk again, but he was never strong enough to tote crates of lettuce and boxes of apples, or remain on his feet in his stall for any length of time. The state awarded him fully disability and the owners of the crane company were found negligent and Pocekaye was awarded a lump sum payment."

"Why was his club membership withdrawn?"

"General poor sportsmanship. Arguing over calls, baiting other players while they were bowling, blaming his partners for his own poor play and not speaking to them for days. He claimed his rude temperament was due to his physical ailments—severe back spasms and chronic headaches. But since he'd joined the club after the accident, there was no way to compare his demeanor before and after."

"Then no one at the bowling club knew him before his accident," said John Duncan.

"No. I didn't know any of them before I joined, either. We were all of us aging, lonely strangers looking for a place to congregate socially."

ARMAND POCEKAYE LIVED IN A WHITE, WOOD-FRAME house in Columbia City, a neighborhood settlement of Greek and Italian truck farmers and warehousemen at several produce companies dotting the green valley.

A driveway ran down one side of 2622 Pennock Street. In plain view was an open garage with a pick-up truck parked inside. Duncan took off for it, his father-in-law in close pursuit.

When they reached the driveway's end, Grandpa Harkennen gestured to the concrete apron beneath their feet. "Loose dirt. Trail of it through the gate there and into the backyard."

"Sloppy work," said Duncan.

Both men entered the backyard and followed the trail of fresh earth down the west side of the garage and around to the rear. There, stacked

in a haphazard pile against the garage's back wall, was a leaning tier of sod. Each piece had been mutilated down to the size of a human fist, just as someone would mutilate the pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle to prevent any solver from ever putting it back together again.

They checked the bed of the pick-up and strangely—but perhaps not so—it was showroom clean.

"He's been careful to clean out the bed of his truck," Duncan said, "and then he leaves those clumps of sod piled behind the garage in the clear light of day."

"Stupid," said Grandpa Harkennen.

"No," countered Duncan, "inconsistent. That sod was brought here by someone else, in another truck, sometime between midnight and dawn while Pocekaye was asleep. That's why all the loose dirt is strewn around the apron. Pocekaye's own pick-up was parked inside the garage. He's left the evidence here hoping that would be enough to incriminate Pocekaye, but he's neglected to leave any evidence of it in Pocekaye's truck. A big mistake."

"Then it isn't Pocekaye."

"No way, Jose. Can you picture a man with an upper body as disabled as his wielding a pick and shovel all night long? And then hiking all that sod up into the raised bed of a truck? No, whoever did the damage at the club wanted two birds stoned. One, he wanted the lawn bowling club put out of action for a very long time. And two, he wanted the blame for it laid at the doorstep of someone else, preferably a former member now in disrepute and with good reason to be vengeful."

"Meeker or Pocekaye," said Duncan's father-in-law.

"He probably flipped a coin. Either way, he loses. He doesn't know Abraham Meeker is in jail and doesn't suspect Armand Pocekaye is a bad bet to have done that much strenuous physical labor."

"Do we talk with Pocekaye?" said Grandpa Harkennen.

"No need to," said Duncan. "Even if he is well enough to have done all that demolition, he isn't fool enough to bring that sod back to his own home. That's like stealing a crumb cake from a bakery and eating it while you escape to your hotel room next door. No, the names Meeker and Pacekaye have now been stricken from our list of suspects."

"Which means we no longer have a list at all," said Grandpa Harkennen.

"Well, we *do* have categories," said Duncan, thinking back to what Tamara Wine had told him about who their vandal might be. "We have a distant stranger who has misread the lawn bowling club as some sort

of posh, suburban hang-out for the rich and sees mutilating the green as his way of knocking the banker's top hat flying with a snowball. And we have some loose nut with a morbid fear of his own mortality. Take your pick, dad."

"And . . . that's *it*? But it *has to* be a club member, doesn't it?"

"Not necessarily. Sure, it makes better sense that way, but then mindless vandalism is a pretty senseless act anyway."

"So where does that leave us now?" Grandpa Harkennen's pale eyes seemed anxious and pleading, as though he were hoping against all reasonable hope that they hadn't reached a dead end and the chase was over. Duncan knew how he was feeling. Here was a bonified criminal case; while beyond it stretched only endless days of watching peewee hockey games and pitching popcorn to pigeons in the park.

"Well, dad, until we develop some fresh leads, we've done about as much as we can do for now."

His father-in-law was showing him a baleful look. "So you're stamping this one 'Unsolved.'"

"Nothing's ever over until it's over, Yogi Berra. I'm not walking away from this. The case just needs more thought."

Duncan had parked the car on the opposite side of Pennock Street and he was bringing up the rear inasmuch as his father-in-law was moving out smartly in a pouting march.

The speeding car seemed to come out of nowhere, as though its velocity had propelled it out of another dimension and into the here and now. Grandpa Harkennen was stepping from the curb, his head and eyes cast straight ahead of him, oblivious to the imminent danger.

Duncan reached him just as the old man was about to clear the parking lane, snatched his right arm just above the elbow and jerked him back rudely. The driver was a kid in a hopped-up car and he came within inches of being a killer.

Seemingly unshocked that he'd nearly become part of an automobile's grille-work, the old man was shaking an angry fist in the air at the receding hotrod. "Damn kids! A residential street and they think it's a course for an Italian road race!"

"Didn't you *see it* coming?" Duncan said, shaken.

"Had my eye on the other side of the street," said Grandpa Harkennen, scarcely missing a beat as he picked up his step again. "My fault. Paying too much attention to what was straight ahead of me and not using the peripheral vision God gave me. Stupid."

Duncan just wanted to get the oldtimer safely back home. They'd put in a full day and he was beginning to feel the strain from it. And he still had that minor mountain of work waiting for him back at Toth.

His father-in-law's apartment was only a scant ten blocks from the lawn bowling club. It was a nice enough three-story building which time had treated kindly. Its grounds were well-kept and there was a laundry room with four washer-dryer units, a recreation room and an elevator. To all appearances, Grandpa Harkennen seemed to be adapting well to the smaller, more circumspect world of the elderly. And yet there were times when he seemed to want to break from it, to spring free and into a wider, younger world.

"I'll see you on Monday morning, son?"

"Let me get some work cleared away first," said John Duncan.

"Don't call us, we'll call you, eh?"

"Now, don't play Petur Pouter with me."

"I'm sorry, John. It's just that this should have been a simpler case to solve. But there's someone out there who's smarter than we are."

"Or luckier," said Duncan. "But luck doesn't hold forever."

"Maybe, maybe not. Didn't you once tell me the longer a crime remains unsolved, the harder it *becomes* to solve?"

"The answer's out there somewhere, spinning in space," John Duncan told him. "We have only to reach out and grab it, pull it to us and call it our own."

Such esoterica wasn't helping to ease their disappointment, so Duncan merely smiled bravely and told Grandpa Harkennen he would call him on Monday.

IT WAS ONLY A BIT AFTER SIX P.M. AND AN HOUR MORE OF daylight remained and it didn't seem right to Duncan to squander time at a desk in a high-rise office building.

Resolved now not to coop himself up that way, the only other direction his instincts seemed to want to take him was back to the lawn bowling club. As yet, no one had checked there for clues or leads and the police hadn't disturbed so much as a blade of grass.

The club's parking lot was empty of cars when Duncan pulled into it. The shoulder-high entrance gate was closed, chained and padlocked. The sun's descending behind the tall, crowded sentinels of fir trees plunged the entire area into a premature darkness.

Duncan hiked himself over the fencing and down onto the paved walkway on the other side. He landed flush on his heels and the pain of it shot up his legs like deep thrusts from a knife. He stood there a moment listening for sounds, but he heard only the wind rustling the firs and putting them into an animate swaying.

The bowling green was unlit. It was still the scarred battlefield it had been that morning. Duncan had expected it might be covered with tarps

out of reverence or mourning, but that was not the case.

He stepped onto it gingerly and headed east, in a diagonal direction, carefully skirting the gaping potholes. Out beyond the club's eastern perimeter, he knew, was a parks department service road. It would have been the vandal's only route of approach and flight.

He took the rise of a small knoll. The grass under his feet turned spongy. The sun flashed fitfully between tree trunks in the false dusk.

And then he came to the fencing and the double-rutted service road just beyond it. He needed to travel only thirty feet in either direction to find the spot where the clumps of sod had been pitched over the fence. Small tufts of it were snagged on the jagged, topmost links of chain and scattered on the service road where a truck had been loaded and then driven off to Columbia City to implicate another. Acts all done by someone who knew Armand Pocekaye was a former club member, and not much liked by the others and so emerged as the perfect patsy.

But who?

And then slowly a face began to etch itself into the wall of Duncan's brain, a physical presence Duncan could now imperfectly recall from that morning. He saw the presence in motion around the edges of the day's main event, unobtrusively and virtually anonymous, coming and going to no one's notice or concern. How perfect for his purposes that the man possessed a certain invisibility, had the spectre of a peripheral ghost, as unseen as the speeding hotrodder who had nearly cut his father-in-law down in Pennock Street.

If someone had played an unfair game here, it might have risen out of another unfairness, perhaps one more long-standing and painful.

Duncan retraced his steps back across the bowling green to the L-shaped clubhouse. The insertion of a credit card let him into the lobby and the simple turn of a doorknob let him into Cyrus Greene's cubbyhole office. There, a desk card file revealed the name and address he sought.

But John Duncan did not leave the clubhouse immediately. Instead, he stalked down hallways like a rat's maze until he found a door lettered MAINTENANCE SHOP—EMPLOYEES ONLY. His credit card did nicely again.

It was a circumspect little world of paints and thinners, waxes and cleaning compounds, gardening and electrical tools, fertilizers and pest sprays.

And one, solitary steel wall locker wherein was hung one pair of bibbed workman's coveralls, the pants cuffs turned up crudely. One at a time, John Duncan turned the cuffs down. Fresh earth and grass spears fell onto the locker's steel floor in a fine mist.

THE ADDRESS ON DRAVUS STREET WAS JUST FOUR BLOCKS from the bowling club, a two-story house of dulled granite and a wide porch and a poorly lettered sign in a front window: HOUSEKEEPING ROOMS. Six small mailboxes were clinging to the outside wall like a family of wrens. In the last light of day Duncan matched the name he'd jotted down in Greene's office with the one printed on the last mailbox, which indicated its holder lived in *Apt. 6-Upstairs/Rear*.

Duncan dismounted the front stairs and made his way to the rear of the house. An uncertain wooden staircase rose up the back of the building. A gravel parking lot seemed to be a piece of property shared with a Lutheran church next door. Parked in the lot was only the ram-shackled pickup truck with its rear license plate hanging by one hinge. In its bed Duncan found lengths of rusted chain and a battered toolbox, both coated with a film of dark earth. A queer bird of a vandal had come home to roost.

The outside door at the top of the staircase was marked as a fire exit. In a sudden outbreak of fire, that staircase would go up like a matchbox to make the route an exit leap into thin air. The hallway was badly lit. Duncan knew the make of the smoke detector affixed to the ceiling ten paces down it. It contained no back-up battery system. When the house's circuit breaker and wiring blew out in the first of the flames, the detector would remain a deadly, silent sentinel.

The first door on the right was misnumbered with a brass 9. Above it was a nail hole where a nail had held the 6 in its proper position. Beneath the toppled 6, a card was slipped into a brass holder. MARIO SETTEBELLO.

When John Duncan knocked, he got the feeling of one silence being replaced by another. Maybe the occupant was considering letting the knock go unanswered until it went away. Fat chance. Duncan was there for the duration.

Then a vertical shaft of light ran down the door sill. Duncan saw a single eye and dark hair hanging down like a nestful of twisted snakes.

"Mr. Settebello, I'm John Duncan. Petur Harkennen's son-in-law."

"The detective, eh? You want to come in and arrest me, is that it?"

"I'm a *private* detective, Mr. Settebello. I couldn't arrest a gun-slinger at high noon if he plugged the whole town and kicked my dog all the way down Main Street."

"Then, you brought the police with you."

"I came alone," Duncan assured him.

"So what do you want with me?"

"I want to talk with you."

"About?"

"I think you know," said Duncan. "The ugliness at the Brierwood Lawn Bowling Club."

"Deserved it," came the clipped reply. "Should have done it sooner. So you think you're going to take me in for that? A young whipper-snapper collects his easy bounty on an old codger?"

"Please. May I step inside, Mr. Settebello?"

"The chase is over. But the deed is done. Sure, why not? When it is cornered, what can the rat do but invite the snake to advance? Come in."

AS LIVING QUARTERS WENT, MARIO SETTEBELLO'S PRIVATE space bespoke a life that was drawing itself in at the corners. There was a small cot, with frail-looking, foldable legs, a small table with a hotplate and a coffee pot and a portable radio and an electric clock, all of it attached by a maze of cords running to a central socket in the ceiling. There was a small bureau, with a rampage of news articles and photographs pasted and pinned to the wall above it. Next to the cot was a single, straightback wooden chair, which held an ashtray, a package of cigarettes, a Zippo lighter embossed with a military insignia and a small, hardback book titled *The Daily Altar*.

So pitifully few possessions for a man of so many years, Duncan was thinking. But then, the old, he'd heard, sometimes thinned out their lives as they grew nearer to their mortal appointment. Neatness, order, simplicity. In a way, Duncan supposed, if you died with more baggage, you caused trouble for everyone: heirs, lawyers, lenders, cleaning ladies.

Mario Settebello had taken a seat on his cot. His hands were knitted loosely on his lap, big and gnarled things, the callouses on them visible to Duncan even from the twelve feet across the room. He made no attempt to clear the things from the chair, which meant he had decided Duncan should stand and just be grateful for a little territory in another's world.

"Mr. Settebello," Duncan began, "you'll have to go back there and set things right."

"Don't see why."

"Because you've hurt them all and hurt the thing they love."

Something Duncan said seemed to stab at the man. Without visibly moving, he seemed to recoil. "Hurt? They don't know hurt. No sir, not like I know it. Not like it's been put on *me*."

The old man had lifted a hand in the air, its index finger extended and pointing at the composite collage pasted and tacked to the wall above the bureau.

"That's hurt," he said. "That's my scrapbook of hurt, Mister Private Detective."

A thin veneer of lacquer had been painted over the collage to protect the older photos and news articles from the atmosphere and the encroachment of time. One picture showed a dignified gentleman in graceful tails and a top hat. He was cutting a stretch of ribbon, while women dressed in long dresses and tossed hats looked on approvingly, their male escorts decked out in dark suits with wide lapels and handle-bar moustaches. The trees in the background were virtual dwarves. The deadline running above the almost daguerreotype photograph read MAYOR SCRIBNER DEDICATES CITY'S NEW PUBLIC LAWN BOWLING CLUB. The picture's accompanying article had been set in the upper corner of the page and so there was no doubt of its date: June 2, 1926.

Other pictures and articles chronicled the bowling club's history up through all the years to the present. There were photos of tea dances and gin rummy tournaments; those of anniversaries and birthdays; more of members themselves engaged in bowling matches or caught in candid shots chatting or foolishly mugging the lounge or cafeteria or at picnic tables set under the firs.

The news articles dealt with match results, marriages, appointments to club offices, even the prestigious afternoon when the club was paid an official campaign visit by Teddy Roosevelt, who had been captured by the camera as a match referee.

THE NAME OF MARIO SETTEBELLO WAS NOT MENTIONED in any of the articles, nor on any of its tournament pairings sheets, nor in the captions beneath the photographs. But he was shown in several of the pictures, frozen on the outskirts of the central action, going about his maintenance duties in his coveralls. In one or two of them, his eyes and head were cocked in the direction of the camera and the event, his expression sometimes curious, sometimes faintly longing, sometimes merely empty and bored.

"My hurt," Mario Settebello was saying now behind Duncan as he scanned this museum of memory. "My hatred. Mario, reroll the lawn for Lane Three. Mario, I've lost my dime in the soft drink machine. Mario, the sink is stopped up in the kitchen. Mario, will you change into white jacket and serve the roast beef? Mario, the locker room dryer is on the fritz. Mario jump, Mario fix, Mario clean, Mario serve . . ."

A tension was building in the claustrophobic little room. A balloon was being force-fed too much air and it was speaking in groans that its

capacity would soon be reached.

" . . . I bowl better than them *all*. One hour every night, after the club is closed, I bowl. Mister Private Detective, *you* ever do something every night for forty-seven years? To *perfection*? Hmph. You haven't even been *on this earth* forty-seven years. And to do what? To follow people around like the KGB, to come pounding on their doors in the dark of night like the Gestapo . . . "

"Why didn't you dump all that sod behind my father-in-law's house?" John Duncan asked, without turning. "It's only a few blocks from here. And yet you drove halfway across . . . "

"At Petur's house? I like Petur. Petur's a nice man. Wouldn't hurt *him*. But that Armand Pocekaye, that stupid, arrogant Greek. When he bowls bad, he blames everything and everyone but himself. It's the sun in his eyes, it's the grass cut ragged, it's the ball out of round. He pouts, he blames, he accuses, he storms out, he doesn't talk to his partner for days. I felt *good* taking the sod there and dumping it on his doorstep like a load of manure. I rub his nose in it, if I could . . . "

If he would not return and confess willingly, Duncan couldn't force him, couldn't whip out a warrant for his arrest and slap him into handcuffs . . .

" . . . fifty-three years," Mario Settebello was saying behind John Duncan now, his tone suddenly turning mean and malicious. "And not once did anyone ask me. Sure, Mario fix-clean-jump-serve . . . but not ask. That is my hurt, Mr. Private Detective."

"Ask you what?"

"Ask . . . to join. All those years I do for them and clean for them and fetch for them and bow and scrape for them . . . "

"Did you ask *them* if you could become a member?"

The question was met by an abrupt silence. As though the question had never been posed and was as unanticipated as a slap from a friend.

"M-me? Why *have to* ask? Forty-seven years I am known there. Never miss a day of work, *not one*. Never complain, *not once*. Never step from my place, *not once*. And *this* is how I am treated. Like servant, like beggar, like . . . *dirt*."

"You could have asked," said Duncan again, quietly. "You *should have* asked, Mr. Settebello."

There came then only a low growl. It grew slowly in menace and timbre. In his mind's eye, Duncan saw a balloon expanding, expanding, expanding . . .

And his mind's eye was showing him something *else* now, something in the room he had given only half a glance, something whose existence and presence was only scarcely acknowledged.

They had been leaning against a wall across the room.

The long-handled shovel and pickax.

The lacquer-painted collage gave off reflections. They were dim and distorted, but John Duncan saw in them the blur of motion, a sense of rushing and then a jagged sweep that moved up the face of the collage like a bolt of inverted lightning. Terror flooded through him, tiny pinches of electricity. He jerked his head and shoulders to the right at almost the same instant as the head of the pickax came screaming down in a deadly arc. It sank a full foot into the collage and the wall, almost to its shaft. Some of the blow impacted his shoulder with such force, he collapsed to his knees, all of a piece, like a dead horse. He fell forward into the wall and his nose cracked hideously.

When he regained his full composure, he was alone in the room. The pickax was still imbedded in the wall above his head. He shuddered to think it had come within an eyelash of causing *his own* appointment with mortality.

Whether it would be judged later as criminal flight, or simply the act of an angry and lonely old man, Duncan couldn't allow him to escape. He got to his feet, let his legs steady beneath him a moment and then rushed out into the hall.

He saw no one. He broke for the fire exit in a half-sprint. He was within a foot of the door when it drew open suddenly, causing Duncan to fall virtually into the arms of the man framed in the doorway.

But the man wasn't Mario Settebello. It was Grandpa Harkennen. And he seemed as genuinely surprised to see Duncan as John Duncan was to see his father-in-law.

"Dad? What the devil . . . "

"It was Settebello, son," said Grandpa Harkennen. "I mean, it *has to* be him, don't you think? Maybe he's getting back at them for all the years of having to do their dirty work, for having to pick up after them. When he could have been a bonified *member*. I mean, it just struck me as a possibility, so I walked over from the house to have a talk with him about it. And then I saw all that dirt and grass in the back of his pickup . . . "

Grandpa Harkennen was cradling something in the hands, but for the moment Duncan couldn't identify it.

"He burst past me down in the parking lot," Duncan's father-in-law was finishing. "He was a growling madman and movin' like a freight train on a downhill grade, so I gave him about a mile's worth of passing on both sides."

"Where is he now?" said John Duncan, with such urgency he wasn't completely sure all the words had come out separately.

"In the cab of his truck," said Grandpa Harkennen, as unperturbed as cold, mushroom soup.

"He's gone, then," John Duncan said, dismally.

"Not without this," said Duncan's father-in-law, now handing him the small, black object in his hands. "Distributor cap. Wasn't it you who told me that when you think you've cornered a bail-jumper, or the object of a skip-trace, or a felon-in-flight, the first thing you do is disable his means of escape?"

"I may have mentioned that to you, dad, yes."

"Disconnected his battery cables, too. Back up the distributor cap with a second plan just in case the distributor cap gets wrestled away from you? Isn't that how you taught me, son?"

"Straight from the handbook, dad."

TOGETHER THEY WENT DOWN THE OUTSIDE STAIRS, THE darkness becoming true now as the sun spent its last fitful moments above a bleeding western horizon.

"He say why he did it?" asked Grandpa Harkennen.

"Forty-seven years with the club and they never asked him to become a member."

"But everyone thought he didn't . . ."

". . . didn't *want* to be a member? Blind assumption. It makes bigger fools of us than blind trust."

For a moment Grandpa Harkennen took that notion into quiet consideration. "Well," he said, "you certainly can't hang a man just for wanting to belong, can you? Hell, then they may as well hang us all."

The hulk of a man behind the wheel in the pickup was leaning forward with his beefy hands cupping his face. Perhaps his assault in the room had not been an attack on John Duncan at all, but a vicious axe blow dealt to all the gentile, privileged, blindly assuming faces in all the lacquered photographs on his wall. It was entirely possible Duncan had only been in the way of a man's rage.

When they helped Mario Settebello from the cab, he was crying. But they were not the tears of a man riddled with guilt, but the tears of an outcast.

In the days and weeks to come, John Duncan would try and see what he could do about that.

It seemed like a simple job—until a man's guts were splattered across a lawn. Then things got complicated—and very, very dangerous!

Dynamite Park

by T. ROBIN KANTNER

THE FAIRWAY OF THE NUMBER 5 HOLE AT NORTH DETROIT Golf Club is wide and straight with a tricky right-hand dog-leg to the green. We were halfway down, surveying the situation in the hot late summer sun. Borrello brought his hand down from his forehead and said, after a glance at his wife, "The three iron, I believe, Mister Perkins."

"Yes, sir." I slipped the club out of the crowded leather bag that was the diameter of a garbage can and handed it to him. Borrello assumed the position next to the ball, folded his big tan hands around the handle, and waggled the head a couple of times.

I thought he was concentrating on his shot, but he had enough excess mental capacity to say, "Joann Royal recommended you quite highly, to us, Mister Perkins."

"Nice of her." I wasn't playing, I was caddying, which kind of sums up my place in the scheme of things.

Now Borrello got serious about preparing for his shot. He was a big beefy gent, stacked high on bones and muscles and swathed all over with fat. He wore a red short-sleeved sport shirt open at the neck, white slacks and white patent-leather shoes. His gray hair was cropped relatively short and, like most execs hauling down three hundred plus a year, he had the kind of tan that made you wonder where he spent more time: Michigan or southern California.

He took his cut at the ball. The practiced, fluid swing produced a shot that soared straight and true down the fairway. Borrello stood with his back to us and stared, probably with rapture, at it. Barbie Borrello said, "Joann told us you recovered a huge sum of money that had been stolen from her."

I don't blab about my cases, win or lose. I said noncommittally, "It was interesting."

Barbie Borrello stared at me expectantly. She was her husband's age,

but looked much younger, thanks to a well-financed and, to date, successful conspiracy among hairdressers, physical therapists, clothing designers and oral and plastic surgeons. She wore purple track shoes, purple hot pants, a purple halter top, tiny purple earrings and, I was quite sure, absolutely nothing else.

Barbie Borrello smiled, but with her mouth only; her violet eyes reflected like a two-way mirror. Borrello finished enjoying his shot, handed me his club, and gave me a swat on the shoulder. "Well, if Joann says you're the man to straighten out my problem, then you're the man."

I SLIPPED THE CLUB BACK INTO THE BAG, HOISTED IT ON- to my shoulder by the strap, and we began walking the gentle down-slope. "Not that I object to getting fresh air," I said, "but I could have met you at your office, or at a bar, or somewhere."

"Not private enough," Barbie Borrello murmured.

Her husband boomed, "This is the electronic age, Perkins. Never know who's got a mike on you, you know?"

I knew, all right, but frankiy, the kind of cases I get, James Bond-type electronic surveillance usually don't figure. I let it drop. "What do you want me to do?"

Borrello began, "There's this woman, see—"

His wife, who had drifted up very close to my left, interrupted, "It's harassment, Mister Perkins, and it has to be stopped!"

I shifted the bag on my shoulder, fished a short cork-tipped cigar out of my shirt pocket, lighted it with a quick blaze of match-flame, and exhaled. I didn't like the feel of this thing. I didn't even know what the assignment was yet, and already I was having trouble finding out which one of them was really my client. I asked, "Let's take it from the top. Mister Borrello?"

The woman casually brushed an acre of bare, tan, smooth skin against my flank, but said nothing. Borrello didn't notice. His eyes were narrow and shrewd, thinking not about the job, but about finding his ball somewhere up ahead. "Rebecca Campanula. Becky. A clerical at the insurance company for a few months. I hardly knew her. Man in my position doesn't come into contact with clericals, as a rule. Ah, there we are. The nine iron, please, Mister Perkins."

"Ben," I said, handing him the club.

"Good, good," he beamed. "I'm Jake. This is terrific. We're all friends here, aren't we, Barbie?"

She didn't answer him, but, as her husband lined up his chip shot, she brushed against me casually again, which I suppose was answer

enough. I shuffled casually away from her, dragging the golf bag along, cigar smoldering in my teeth. I'm no prude, but I have a funny habit of not fooling around with the client's wife, at least till the job's over.

Jake Borrello made his shot, a high-altitude number that sliced just right, then caught a good bounce that propelled it over a bunker and onto the green, ending up just five or six feet from the cup. Borrello turned and, raising both fists in the air in a victory salute, beamed. It was the same grin I'd seen him make in his campaign ads, which had just started that week.

Barbie Borrello said, without much enthusiasm, "Nice shot, Jake."

"Hey, I'm rolling now," he said exuberantly, handing me the iron. "Putter, Perkins."

I made a note to adopt that as a nickname if I decided to improve my station in life—not to mention my income—by becoming a pro caddy. "What about this Rebecca Campanella?"

"Campanula," he corrected, taking the putter. "Well, like Barbie says, Becky's gotten to be a real nuisance the past few weeks." We walked across the deep-pile green to the ball. Borrello began doing the Arnie Palmer routine, bending, sighting the lie of the putt, using his putter as a strange kind of plumb bob, apparently doing lots of fancy arithmetic in his head. I was impressed as hell. "She's pestering me all the time, calling me on the phone, sending me letters, running into me places."

"Why for?" I asked, letting the golf bag flop over with a clank.

Borrello finished his arcane calculations, rose, faced me, and said, "I don't know. But a man of my position, you know, with the campaign and everything, I don't need some strange chick making trouble, you know?"

I pulled at my cigar and exhaled slowly. Barbie Borrello stood, arms folded before her, staring off back up the fairway. "Any specific kind of trouble you can tell me about?"

Jake Borrello let his putter slip through his hands, caught it at the grip, and bent over the ball, lining up his putt. "Well, like, for example. I gave a speech at the Bloomfield Economics Club, Wednesday last week. Big crowd there, couple hundred. After my talk it was question-and-answer time. Way they work it there, you just don't holler out, you write your questions down and pass them up. I handled a couple of them, then opened the next one. When I read it, I knew it was from her. I looked up, real quick, and saw her sitting out in the audience, grinning from ear to ear."

"What did it say?" I asked.

Borrello quit waggling his putter and positioned the business end behind the ball. "Don't make me tell you. It was embarrassing. I guess I'd say, uh, frank and suggestive and crude. *Real* crude."

I glanced at Barbie Borrello. She was still lost in her contemplation of the scenery. Well, I reflected, it wasn't *my* idea for her to be here. I asked her husband, "Did you ever have a romp with Ms. Campanula, Jake?"

"No," he said tonelessly. He gave the ball a tap. It tore across the green, missed the hole by at least three feet and dropped down the bluff back into the rough.

"Aw," Barbie said.

Jake Borrello straightened. His complexion was doughy, and from the look on his face and his grip on the putter I felt he was deciding whether to break it over his knee or throw it at me. Instead, he exhibited remarkable self-control as he walked toward me and handed it out. "Nine iron," he said tightly.

I traded clubs with him gingerly and he skittered down the bluff to his ball. I backed out of the line of the shot and—hell of a coincidence—ran into Barbie Borrello, who made a giggling squeal and steadied me overly sensuously with one hand on my bicep and the other cradling my hip. I detached myself and stood rather primly to the side as Jake Börrello made an excellent chip that got his ball within two feet of the pin.

He made his beam at me as he traded clubs with me again. "I had nothing personal to do with Ms. Campanula," he said. "I think she's a very unstable young woman who's gotten fixated on me somehow and has started this little series of stunts. It's relatively common when you're in the public eye." He hoofed up the bluff with me behind him and Barbie to my left. "I could just ignore it, I suppose, but—"

Barbie interrupted, "But Jake is running for office and this woman is a potential threat. She must be stopped. That's what we're hiring you to do."

Borrello, ignoring us, bent over his ball and tapped it effortlessly into the cup. As he retrieved it and handed it to me, I said, "Has she made any demands upon you? Like, 'Do X and I'll stop pestering you'?"

"Nope. Not a thing." Borrello slid his putter into the golf bag and faced me, big tan hands on hips.

"Well," I said, taking a hit off my cigar, "then the only way to stop her is intimidation, and the only kind of intimidation that really works is physical. You follow?"

"We understand each other perfectly," Borrello grinned.

"Not really." I squinted, took a last puff on the cigar and dropped it

on the turf. "I don't do strong-arm, at least haven't for years, not this kind."

"But such services can be purchased, I presume," Barbie Borrello said softly from very near me.

"I got a right to pursue my interests unmolested," Borrello said. "I've tried reasoning with her and have gotten nowhere. The woman is clearly irrational. I won't have her complicating my political campaign at this point. Have I made myself clear?"

I looked up into his flat, placid face and said quietly, "I suppose I can job it out."

"Perkins, I want to know what time it is, not how to build a watch. Barbie?"

She reached into the waistband of her hot pants and handed me a folded wad of paper something. I looked down into the smug face of Ben Franklin. The wad was crisp and thick, and warm and moist from Barbie Borrello's body.

"One thousand dollars now," Jake Borrello said, "and another thousand, payable in cash thirty days after my last contact with Becky Campanula. Fair enough?"

I'm pretty slow, so it took me nearly three seconds to decide that it was.

I WAS TRYING TO COAX THE DEFUNCT ALTERNATOR OUT of my friend Carole Somers' car, a station wagon of foreign, mixed and highly questionable parentage, when my wireless telephone rang.

I wrapped a rag around my greasy hand, walked over and picked up the phone. It was Dickie Dukes, and even though the sound reproduction of these new phones is horrible, I had no trouble understanding him; his resonance would make Pavarotti envious. "Do me any good, Dickie?"

"No dice, man. Cocky bitch. Said to shove it. Laughed me outta the place."

I puffed, staring blankly over the wide grassy courtyard of Norwegian Wood. "Guess it's time for phase two, huh, Dickie?"

Dickie Dukes was brisk, as always. "What'll it be, fingers, or a knee or two, or what?"

"Let me think."

"How about the face? Can I have the face?"

"Wait a minute."

"You got no mind for plannin', man. Shoulda figured I might run into this. I *ast* you if I had the remodeling option open to me before going in there. 'Oh no,' you says. 'Just try to scare her first.' Had to

drive all the way over here to Dynamite Park 'fore I could find a phone. Christ!"

Everybody's a critic. "She got stairs in that' joint?"

A pause. "Yeah, she do."

"Well, show her those."

"Ain't no flair to *that*, man."

"Results matter more to me than style. Get rolling, Dickie, and report back to me."

"Oooohkay, boss. Be—"

Glass exploding. A booming in the distance. A scream, Dickie's scream, and then silence, except for the TONK TONK TONK of the phone receiver tapping on the glass window of the phone booth somewhere in Dynamite Park.

THE MEAT WAGON WAS JUST PULLING AWAY—NO SIREN or lights—by the time I found the place. It was one of those big pulloffs by the river practically in the center of Dynamite Park, and, like it is most bright summer days, it was jammed with teenage kids and their vans, motorcycles, tape players and marijuana clouds. Aside from myself, the only strangers were the five or six uniformed and plainclothes police officers milling around the phone booth at the foot of the dead-end.

From my Mustang I could see that the phone booth, probably the last glass-enclosed booth left in the state of Michigan, had been blown apart, from the looks of it by a shotgun. Blood-soaked glass lay in shards on the concrete and reflected wetly from the grass in the afternoon sun. Forensics people were poking with intent faces through the debris; investigators had cornered a handful of scroungy teenagers over against the side of a city of Detroit black-and-white, and none other than Elvin Dance, chief of homicide, Detroit Police detective bureau, was directing the madness from his perch on the front fender of his plain Chrysler LeBaron.

When I saw Dance, I mashed my Mustang into reverse, but he spotted me and shouted, "Perkins! Park it and walk your ass over here, boy."

I parked, disembarked, and strolled over there. Elvin slid down onto the pavement, straightened his coat and glowered at me. He's a short, heavily muscled bull of a man, skin a rich black, hair shaved so short his skull gleams, suit green and natty, eyes mean as a snake, or maybe that's only when he sees me.

"What you doing, cruisin' for poon, Perkins?"

"Nah, I'm not in the market for herpes, Elvin."

He let the silence drag. Cops know that people with something to hide tend to yack on and on, explaining themselves when there's really no reason. So I waited him out.

"So what you doing here, boy?"

I shrugged. "Was taking a short cut down Haynes Drive over there. Saw the black-and-whites and the meatwagon. You know me, Elvin; nosy."

"Yeah, I know you, Perkins, shuckin' and jivin'."

I spread my hands. "I'm a world-class rubbernecker, that's all. Some crime in that?"

He wasn't buying. "What's this all about here?"

I squinted toward the wrecked phone booth. "I'll take a wild stab at it. Looks like maybe a shotgun got somebody over there, judging from the glass and the blood and stuff."

"The somebody," Elvin Dance said deliberately, "was one Dickie Dukes. Know him?"

"Sure I know him. Strong-arm, isn't he?"

"Wasn't he. Unless Wayne County General got real good at head reattachment, Dickie ain't gone be strong-armin' or hypin' or much of anything else any more."

"I didn't know he was a hype," I said.

Elvin Dance leaned back against the fender. Stone-sober cop weariness appeared on his face. "A real pro job, looks like. Dickie was on the phone; kids saw a man with a duffel bag walk right up to the booth. They didn't see no gun, must of been sawed-off, hid in the bag. Two shots, guts and face, right through the phone booth windows. Hit man kept right on walking up the hill, through them woods. Must've had a car waiting there on Joy Road."

"Slick," I agreed.

Elvin Dance pulled a pack of Kools out of his coat pocket and shook one into his lips. I lighted it with a wood match, which I also used to light a cigar for myself. Elvin said softly, "I hate this goddam park. Sucker runs on for miles along the river here, couple thousand acres of woods and trails. Become a kids' party joint this year. You know, ex-partner of mine was up at the Soo last weekend, three-four hundred miles away, saw a bumper sticker on a car there, says, 'I Party at Dynamite Park.' Families don't come no more, it's become a place where bad things can happen, and usually do."

He jerked a thumb toward the phone booth. "Like *this*." He glared darkly at me. "You sure you don't know nothing about it?"

"Nope."

He grunted. "Well, in that case, it's a goner. This type of deal, either we break it right away or forget it. You make tracks away from here, Ben, while I go put this thing in the someday maybe file."

THAT DICKIE DUKES WAS HIT RIGHT AFTER VISITING
Rebecca Campanula was troublesome enough—gunplay always troubles me unless I'm the one doing it—but what troubled me even more was the nature of the hit. In the parlance, it was an "open-air" job, solid pro all the way from location to weapon to getaway. Dickie Dukes was no Florence Nightingale, but his action was nowhere near heavy enough to bring him to the attention of the guys best equipped to carry out this kind of quick, clean execution.

And I found it an incredible coincidence that the hit happened right after he tried to strong-arm Campanula. Which meant that if he wasn't involved with the professionals, maybe Campanula was. Question was, why was she involved. And what, if anything, did it have to do with Borrello?

I had to get to the bottom of those questions before moving on Campanula again, so I did some asking around. My kind, generous, public-spirited paid informant Kenny Slingluff, a middle-management grunt at Michigan Bell, pulled the file on Campanula and gave me the name of her employer: Ritchie Enterprises, Box 36682, Detroit. Meant nothing.

I also put out an inquiry through contacts in Detroit's underground intelligence network—yeah, buddy, there is one, and it's faster and more accurate than the Eyewitness News Team—for anyone with information on one Campanula, Rebecca.

A couple days later I got a call from Amos Walker, a private detective over in Hamtramck. He told me he didn't know Campanula, but a client of his had worked with her at Borrello's insurance company, and might have something helpful to say. We agreed on the fee—which wasn't money, simply my promise to lend him a hand sometime, legal tender in this line of work—and Walker set up a meeting for me with his informant at the Donut Hole shop on Fort Street in Lincoln Park.

I'd run into a dead end trying to track down Ritchie Enterprises, Campanula's employer of record. Not in the phone book, not in the

criss-cross, not in the Chamber of Commerce or BBB registrations. So this thin, slender, second-hand lead of Walker's was going to have to help me, or else I'd have to go straight at Campanula and maybe end up at the wrong end of a shotgun like the unlamented, and very late, Dickie Dukes.

SHE WAS A BIG, CHUBBY, VIVID RED-HEAD WHOSE FACE showed evidence of a long-standing friendship with the grape. She was in her mid-forties, wore lots of rings and had her hair poofed back in one of those old-fashioned beehive styles. She wore jeans and an old Teamsters Local 299 windbreaker, and she huddled over the small table, a steaming cup of black cupped in one large hand and a fistful of half-eaten doughnuts in the other.

She started by telling me that Amos Walker was a nice man who'd helped her out once and she was glad to do anything he asked, which was, apparently, to spill her guts to me.

"What's your name?" I began as I got a cigar going.

"Gayle," she said in a husky voice.

"Last name?"

She smiled, showing miles of red lips. "Unspecified."

"Unspecified!" I grinned. "What nationality is that?"

"Survivor."

"Good breeding." I drank some coffee. "What's the book on Campanula?"

"Sweet Becky Campanula," she laughed richly.

"Meaning what."

"Oleo legs," she answered through a mouthful of doughnut. "Smooth and easily spread."

"Like for who?"

"You look like a busy man, so I'll save you some time by saying that the mail boy at the insurance company was the only one *not* getting it."

My coffee was gone and I waved for the waitress. "I take it, then, that Jake Borrello was on the hit parade?"

"Very definitely. Among other transgressions."

"Such as?"

The waitress dropped off a fresh jug of coffee, took Gayle Unspecified's order for a half-dozen cherry-filled, and scooted away. Gayle leaned toward me, bringing me within the effective range of her dime-store scent. I covered it up by puffing extra hard on my cigar. The woman said, "You ever hear the carrot story?"

"This a dirty joke?"

"Sort of," she giggled. "Mister Borrello was always dieting. Weird

diets—carbohydrates, starch-free, Cuppa Soup, stuff like *that*, you know? Once he went on carrots. Yeah! Carrots! Skipped his meals, munched carrots all the time. Gnawed on 'em so much his hands turned orange-ish, sorta. 'Bugs' Borrello, the staff started calling him."

I wanted to follow up on her comment about transgressions. "This leading somewhere, Gayle?"

"Hold your horses, bud." Her doughnuts came. She grabbed two, squeezed them together and bit, smearing her mouth with jelly. When she'd swallowed enough to breathe, she went on furrily, "He started walking around the office with a carrot stub hanging out of his mouth, like a cigar. One day in the middle of a staff meeting Ms. Becky Campanula went up to him and bit the carrot right off. And chewed it. And swallowed it. You shoulda seen the look on his face. After that we *knew* something was going on."

No doubt, but who cared? "Transgressions, Gayle."

The half-dozen doughnuts were gone. Gayle inhaled her coffee, set the mug down, wiped her smeared mouth primly, and said, "Aside from Sweet Becky, plenty. Like, fudging his expense reports. Unauthorized trips at company expense. Ladies other than Becky; he wasn't even faithful to *her*. Stuff like that. The guy was in business for himself."

My mug was almost empty, the coffee about as cold as this lead. "Any involvement with the gentlemen in suits? Either Borrello or Campanula?"

She tossed the wad of napkin down suddenly. "I wouldn't know about that. I was only a typist, Mister Perkins."

I stared wearily at her, then fished out a five and tossed it on the table. "Get yourself another half-dozen, for the road." I rose.

"Thanks, Mister Perkins!" she said cheerfully. "I sure hope Mister Borrello isn't in any kind of trouble. He's such a nice man. I'm going to vote for him. Aren't you?"

SO BORRELLO WAS NO ANGEL. I DIDN'T CARE ABOUT that. My job was to get Becky Campanula off his back. I wasn't going to try another Dickie Dukes routine till I knew for sure who was backing her. The only lead I had left was Ritchie Enterprises, whoever *they* were.

The next morning I strolled into the Grand River Avenue post office promptly at eight a.m. and took up watch within sight of Post Office Box Number 682. Mission: intercept whoever retrieved the mail and follow him to Ritchie Enterprises.

Just after ten o'clock, a guy opened the box and took out the mail.

My excitement died when I saw him take the mail from a dozen other boxes as well. A paid courier service, I realized; hired to pick up the mail and deliver it to his customers. I didn't even follow him. I had no way of knowing which of his stops was Ritchie Enterprises, unless I got real lucky.

So I found a stationery store on McNichols, bought a bright red nine-by-twelve envelope, addressed it to the President of Ritchie Enterprises, and mailed it at the Grand River post office.

The next morning, the Courier showed up at ten sharp and retrieved the mail, which included my empty red envelope. I got on his trail. There followed a boring four-hour tour of west Detroit. I watched him with binoculars at each stop, looking for the red envelope as he sorted and delivered the mail.

Finally, he delivered my envelope, along with a wad of other stuff, to a mansion on Jefferson Avenue in Saint Clair Shores. I sat there in my Mustang, stupefied, as he drove away. I knew that house.

ART DRINKARD STARED AT ME AS I SLID TWO C-NOTES along the bar and left them before his fat little hands. "Who do I have to kill?" he asked in his scratchy, shrill voice.

"Nobody," I said easily. "Just take some pictures for me."

"Oo," he said. He adjusted his thick tortoise shell glasses and licked his prominent lips. "Pictures is what I do, Perkins." He glanced at me warily. "This isn't another one of your kick-in-the-door, 'Get your pants on now' jobs, is it?"

"We call 'em domestic matters. No, it isn't one of those."

"'Kay." Art Drinkard signalled to Bill, Under New Management's evening bartender, and Bill supplied us with another round of Stroh's. "Gimme the poopy."

"You know Dynamite Park?"

"Yeah." Drinkard downed half his beer, throat bobbing.

"There's that dead-end just south of the Newburg cutoff. Late-night make-out site. East of that, off Joy, there's a bluff that looks down on the dead-end."

Art Drinkard finished his beer, which was a good thing because, the way he was sweating, he had a lot of liquid to replace. Only guy I know who can put away a six-pack and never hit the head. "I been by there."

"Tomorrow afternoon you set up with a tripod and telephoto lens on that bluff. When I pull into the dead-end with my car, you get a couple miles of shots of me and whoever's sitting in the passenger seat." I gave him some additional instructions.

Drinkard bit his lip and studied his thumbnail. "You're driving

what, '71 Mustang convertible, blue?"

"Yeah. And I want nice clear crisp shots of me and the other party, then you do just like I told you."

Art Drinkard's fat hands closed around the bills, compressed them into a spitwad, and made them disappear. "You're too generous," he wheezed.

"Top pay for top work, Art," I answered.

BECKY CAMPANULA'S DODGE ARIES BROKE DOWN HALF A mile from her apartment, on Inkster Road just north of the Jeffries. I pulled up behind her as she got out and strode up to her as she fought her way through a cloud of steam to her hood. "Looks like you got a problem, ma'am."

"Overheated!" she hollered over the noise of the rush-hour traffic darting around us.

I popped the hood and winced as superheated steam charged from the radiator into my face. I coughed and said, "Something screwed up in the radiator," I said.

"Oh Christ!" she snapped. "Can you give me a ride somewhere?"

Better and better. "I'd be delighted." We got into my Mustang and rolled away.

Rebecca Campanula was maybe 35, a tall, limby lady with a sharp nose, pale blue eyes, and knowing, ruthless mouth. Her rich chestnut hair was probably quite long when it wasn't done up like it was now, braided in a rope and wound around her head, with odds and ends sticking out and bangs arcing over her patrician forehead. She wore a pale green sleeveless one-piece dress that went down just to her well-shaped knees. Her body was a sexually definitive statement, reclining languidly there in the bucket seat of my Mustang as we drove.

I'd bet myself that she wouldn't talk till we got to Haynes Drive, and I nearly won. We were just north of there when she said, "Hey, friend, you just passed a gas station. Turn around."

"I don't think so, Becky."

I felt those cold blue eyes on me. "Who are you?" she asked coldly.

"Your kidnapper, bitch. Now shut up and be quiet." I wheeled onto Haynes Drive and kicked into fourth, heading for the entrance to Dynamite Park.

She sounded amused. "My kidnapper?"

"Yeah. You don't think your car just up and broke down by magic back there, do you?"

"Didn't it?" she retorted.

"Hell no. Put a pound of plaster of paris in the radiator and say

goodbye to the water pump. Old gag, works every time.”

We-wheeled into Dynamite Park. The narrow blacktop road was lined with pickups and vans and cars, the picnic areas cluttered with frisbee throwers, picnickers, gangs of kids. I reached to my dash and hit a button, killing the soft Springsteen that had been playing from the big speakers on the rear deck.

Becky Campanula shifted in her seat, crossing one well-made leg over the other, which, quite consciously I’m sure, hiked her dress up her thighs a couple of inches. “Men always *have* gone to extreme lengths to get dates with me.”

“Yeah?” I asked. “Sorry, I’m spoken for. This little meeting is designed for me to find out about you and Jake Borrello, and what gives with all that.”

The traffic lightened up past the midpoint of Dynamite Park, and in a minute I pulled into the dead-end by the Newburg cutoff and parked at the end. I shut off the motor, leaving the key in the accessory position.

Becky said coldly, “You know who Steve Ritchie is?”

“Vaguely,” I lied.

“If you *really* knew, you wouldn’t toy with me.”

“Why?”

“A man messed with me a couple days ago, and I made one call to Mister Ritchie and the man got blown away in this very park, bud. That answer your question?”

“I want to know about Borrello,” I said stolidly, staring straight through the windshield at the bluff.

I felt her leaning very close to me. “Mister Ritchie and his friends—and if you don’t know who *they* are, you may find out very soon—support Borrello’s opponent in the election. They’re paying me to harass Borrello. Keep him edgy and worried so he makes mistakes. Simple job, but important. Important enough to Mister Ritchie that, if I make one phone call about you, you’ll find out what the bottom of Lake St. Clair is like. Permanently. You read me, buster?”

I looked at her, then dropped my eyes. “I didn’t know it was anything like that,” I said. “Listen, um—I’ll drop you off at the cab stand, and we’ll forget about the whole thing, okay?”

“You’ll drive me back to my car,” she said icily, “and get it running again, and *then* maybe I’ll consider not sending Mister Ritchie’s boys after you. But only maybe. Now drive.”

I obeyed her orders precisely. When her car was running and she’d driven away, I popped the cassette out of my dash, slid it into a pre-addressed container, and dropped it into the mail chute at the Redford

post office. Only then, as I headed for home, did I light a cigar and relax, just a little.

I WAS PICKING UP MY MAIL TWO MORNINGS LATER IN Marge's office at Norwegian Wood when a pair of Mister Ritchie's hired guns showed up.

It was a Mutt and Jeff team: the tall guy was older and thin, the short guy was younger and stocky. They wore dark suits, had dark hair and five o'clock shadow, and the senior man wore a gap-toothed smile. "Mister Perkins? Why don't you come with us."

Marge, Norwegian Wood's sales manager, glanced nervously at me. I said, "Maybe I don't feel like it."

The young Turk kicked Marge's office door shut with the back of his heel. The tall, older one produced an S&W .38 Centennial, pointed it at me, and said, "Don't make us get ugly."

Marge squeaked, covered her mouth, and looked at me with frozen eyes. I said with a resigned voice, "Sure, fellas. But I got to take some stuff with me for this meeting. Okay?"

They stared at me silently. I turned to Marge and said, "You still got that overhead projector, and cassette player?"

She uncovered her mouth, revealing white lips, and pointed shakily at the credenza behind her. I walked to it as Mutt, the one with the gun, moved forward toward me. I said, "I'll go quietly, but I've got to be prepared." I rescued the heavy, bulky overhead projector from the credenza, along with the cassette player, then retrieved a couple of packages from my mail and said cheerfully, "Ready?"

The gunsels gave me doubtful looks as they shooed me out of Marge's office. We stepped out of the building onto Norwegian Wood's parking lot. I said to the senior man, "My suggestion is that you get someone with real authority to meet with me."

The young Turk said, "Hey, Gangemi, we got a wise-ass on our hands."

"Unless, of course," I said casually, "Mister Ritchie wants to see some real ugly material about him appear in the papers this week."

The black Chevy Caprice at the curb was theirs. Gangemi, the older man, said sympathetically, "Listen, Perkins, we got our orders, just go along quiet and don't complicate it, okay? We're just a couple of working guys trying to get through the day, you know?"

The young Turk opened the back door of the Caprice and said, "In there, wise-ass."

"Okay," I said helplessly, tossing the overhead projector and the cassette player in ahead of me. "I feel sorry for you fellas. What I've

got in these envelopes is also in a safe deposit box, and the keys to that box are in the hands of my attorney and an inspector with the Michigan State Police, with instructions to open the box and provide the contents to the newspapers should I, shall we say, turn up missing."

The men stared placidly at me. I sighed. "Sure, I'll be dead, but when the stuff hits the fan about Mister Ritchie, so will you. So do yourselves a favor. Take charge of your lives. Make a decision for yourselves. Show some executive judgment, why don'tcha."

Gangemi said to his partner, after a silence, "Watch him." He trotted back into the building. The young Turk, who had the kind of upwardly mobile enthusiasm that's highly sought after in the corporate world, told me with great relish what plans were in store for me. I nodded a lot and ignored him, watching the doorway of Norwegian Wood's main building.

When Gangemi came back out, I knew what he was going to say. "Slight change of plans," he grunted to his disappointed partner. "Temporary," he growled at me over the seat. We roared away from there, with the young Turk at the wheel, Gangemi riding shotgun, and me in the back—with the projector, the tape player, a couple of envelopes, and a world-class case of nerves.

THEY ESCORTED ME TO THE PLUSH CONFERENCE ROOM of a large law firm in the Titanium Towers complex in Southfield. The room contained nothing but an oval shaped mahogany table surrounded by plush chairs, a portable podium in the corner, and a retractable screen hanging against the far wall. Lights filtered indirectly from recessed fixtures in the ceiling. The place was empty and silent.

Gangemi said, "Drop the stuff and sit tight. I'll be right back." He left me and his partner to breathe air-conditioning for a few minutes; then the door opened again and Gangemi came in behind a tall, hawk-faced, dark-haired man with fighter-pilot good looks. He held out his hand and grinned as we shook. "Rick Savastano, Mister Perkins, how are you?"

I matched his easy coolness as best I could. "I'm Ben, Rick. Real good, real good."

"Glad to hear it, Ben." Rick Savastano wore a gray vest, matching trousers and a white-on-white shirt with a burgundy tie whose knot was held forward by a gold collar-pin. He had more bucks on his body than I have in my entire closet. He put a solicitous hand on my shoulder and asked, "You have everything you require for this meeting?"

"Brought my equipment and stuff with me. I'm all set."

"Can we get you any refreshment? Coffee? Soda? Maybe something

stronger?

"Thanks, no. We ready to talk?"

"Sure, Ben. Be right with you." He turned to the young Turk. "Frank, would you excuse us? Tell my girl to hold my calls. Mister Gangemi and Mister Perkins and I will be busy for, oh, fifteen minutes or so."

Frank Whoosis nodded and backed out, shutting the door behind him quietly. I set up the overhead projector and the cassette player, plugged them in and turned them on, then opened the envelopes. One contained an unlabeled Phillips cassette, the other a wad of heavy plastic transparencies. While I made the arrangements, Gangemi took a chair between me and the door, and Rick Savastano took another half-way down on the other side of the table, propped one leg casually over the other, and cupped his hands at the back of his head.

When I was set, I said to Savastano, "I kind of hoped I'd be meeting Mister Ricci," intentionally using the pre-Anglicized pronunciation of his name.

"Steve couldn't make it," Savastano said apologetically. "He's been fully briefed, of course. Now, why don't you show us what you came to show us."

It didn't take long. The transparencies, which Art Drinkard had made from his black-and-whites, were just beautiful, showing me and Becky Campanula in the front seat of my Mustang, while our voices came with startlingly vivid fidelity from the speaker of the cassette player.

Me: "This little meeting is designed for me to find out about you and Jake Borrello, and what gives with all that."

Becky: "You know who Steve Ritchie is?"

Becky again: "A man messed with me a couple days ago, and I made one call to Mister Ritchie and the man got blown away in this very park, bud."

Becky yet again, her voice so real I could feel her sitting next to me: "They're paying me to harass Borrello . . . Simple job, but important. Important enough to Mister Ritchie that, if I make one phone call about you, you'll find out what the bottom of Lake St. Clair is like."

At the end of the tape, I shut the overhead projector off and commented, "From what Mister Gangemi's friend Frank told me, my appointment today as with Lake Erie, not St. Clair, but otherwise Ms. Campanula's comments were reasonably accurate, wouldn't you say?"

Rick Savastano shrugged. "I wouldn't know; I don't get involved in operations." He brought his hands down and cupped them before him on the table, leaning forward on his forearms, hawklike gaze on me.

"The pix, I can see how that was done. How'd you tape her without her knowing?"

"My in-dash cassette system is a recorder too. Uses the speakers as mikes. Comes in handy, sometimes."

"I should say."

To have something to do, I hit the rewind button on the cassette player and said, "I assume, Rick, that my appointment with Lake Erie is cancelled now."

Savastano sniffed and stared past my shoulder at the wall behind me, considering. "On what basis, Ben? You're here, and so are the transparencies and the tape. I anticipate retaining these and sending you on your way with Frank and Mister Gangemi, as planned."

I felt Gangemi's cold eyes on me as I laughed shortly. "What do you think I am, right off the boat? This stuff here, it's all copies. Like I told Gangemi, the originals are in a safe deposit box at this very moment. The keys to the box are in the custody of my attorney and an inspector with the Michigan State Police."

"Who?" Savastano asked sharply.

"Dick Dennehy. Special Investigations."

Savastano arched an eyebrow at Gangemi, who shook his head slightly.

I went on more soberly, "It's the old bit. Anything happens to me, anything at all, and the box gets opened and the contents go to the newspapers. There will follow lots of nice stories about Mister Ricci being involved in manipulating an election, not to mention the murder of Dickie Dukes."

"Such things can be managed, Mister Perkins."

"But why bother?" I leaned toward Savastano. "Is keeping Jake Borrello from being elected so important to Mister Ricci that he'd go through so much publicity and the hassle, on the account of a flaky dumb broad like Campanula? I know you guys; you operate on a risk versus return basis. While you had her doing your bidding with minimal risk, it was a paying proposition, but the equation has shifted, and you know it."

A long, long silence. If they heard my heart thumping, they gave no sign. Finally, Rick Savastano sat up straighter in his chair and said, "Okay, but what about you?"

"What *about* me?"

He smiled, showing no teeth. "What's to stop you from getting this information publicized anyway, just for sport?"

"I'm not into sport. I'm just a working lug trying to do my job. You stay offa me, I stay offa you. Fair enough?"

Savastano's face elongated, his eyes turning to slits. "Your *job*? Just how *did* you get involved in this, Ben?"

No reason not to tell him. "Jake Borrello hired me to get Becky Campanula off his case. No big deal."

Savastano smiled, showing teeth this time. "But you haven't *done* your job, Ben. Nothing about the arrangement we've agreed on gets Ms. Campanula off Borrello's case."

"Hm. Forgive my oversight. I'm assuming you'll take care of that little loose end for me."

JAKE BORRELLO'S VOICE AT THE OTHER END OF THE phone was hushed and respectful. "You couldn't have missed it. It's in this afternoon's *News*."

"Haven't seen the papers," I answered. "My girlfriend's starter motor is shot and I've been—"

"Dynamite Park!" he interrupted. "They found Becky there. Strangled. Her body was bloated practically beyond recognition. She'd been in the river for days."

"Guess she won't be bothering you no more, huh, Jake?"

"I didn't hire you to kill her, Perkins!"

"And I *didn't* kill her," I answered impatiently.

"My God, this is just awful," he muttered.

I lost my temper. "Let me spell it out for you, Borrello. You hired me to get Campanula off your back, and as it turned out the only way I could do that was to use her as a patsy to get leverage on the people behind her. What happened to her is their way of dealing with patsies, that's all."

"No specifics, for God's sake! I don't want to know!"

"No reason for you to. Just stay in your squeaky-clean corporate world and write this whole thing off as your first close brush with the street, where bad things can happen and usually do."

"I didn't want her dead," he said sullenly.

"But say hey, she got dead anyhow. Tell you what. I won't lose any sleep over it if you won't, okay, Jake, old son, old son?"

I enjoyed the scandalized silence that stretched on for a full minute. Then Jake Borrello said, "In view of this development, I think I can see my way clear to waive the thirty-day waiting period we'd agreed to. You'll have your money this afternoon."

I did, too. Hand-delivered by an anonymous courier. In cash.

Jake Borrello won the election the following November. No one was more delighted than me. Sure, he's a crook, but at least he's *my* crook.

"Video games make some children too ready to accept violence, or even willing to copy it."

*Dr. C. Everett Koop,
Surgeon General of the United States*

The Video Fan

by JOHN SOENNICHSEN

Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane
Martinville, Maryland, 21117

January 3, 1984

Dear Sirs:

I am 13 years old and received your model ZX Deluxe Video Game Center for Christmas. I told my dad I wanted it real bad all last year, and he finally got it for me.

I only have two game cartridges: Army (real fun shooting all those tanks) and Bonkers, where the clown has to jump to avoid the cannonballs shot at him.

I'm planning to buy all the games you make some day. Then I'll be the best at Video Vision games of anybody!

Thanks for making such a fun game system!

Sincerely,
Danny Ross
3286 Willow Lane
Portland, OR 97211

January 15, 1984

Master Danny Ross
3286 Willow Lane
Portland, OR 97211

Dear Video Vision Player:

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding our Video Vision model ZX game module. It continues to be our most popular unit on the market, and we will continually update our library of game cartridges for players such as yourself.

We regret that the volume of mail we receive does not allow us to personally answer your letter, but be assured we value your business. As a token of our appreciation, we have enclosed a coupon good at any Video Vision distributor for one dollar off the price of any Video Vision game cartridge.

Thank you again for your interest in Video Vision products.

Sincerely,

J.D. Kilgore
Director, Consumer Relations,
Video Vision, Inc.

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, Maryland, 21117

March 10, 1984

Dear Mr. Kilgore,

I finally saved enough money to buy Starship Command, and used the one dollar coupon you sent me. I had to mow a lot of lawns to save enough. Next time, I have to think of a way to make some money faster!

I think I have the highest score on our block with Starship Command. My friend Devon had 3,500,258 points and that was the record until I got 3,823,000 the other night. It took me until midnight before I finally got beat.

Do you keep records of high scores for Starship Command? I think I can score even higher if I spend more time with it, and maybe could get the highest score in the state. Please tell me if you know what the all-time high score is.

My birthday is in May, and I hope to receive some more games then.

I've hinted to everyone that's what I want. My dad just shakes his head, but I know he'll buy me some!

Please send the latest catalog of games you'll be coming out with this year.

Sincerely,

Danny Ross,
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinville, Maryland, 21117

June 1, 1984

Dear Mr. Kilgore,

I now own half of all the game cartridges you make, and hope to buy the rest before the year passes.

On my birthday last month, I received Paratrooper, Jungle Warfare, Reconnoiter and Mine Field. I also got fifty dollars from my grandmother to buy clothes with, but instead I got Vulcan Raiders and Space Warriors on sale at two for fifty bucks!

My dad told me to take the games back, but the store said they wouldn't because I had already opened them. Mom says grandmother would turn blue if she knew what I did with the money she sent me, but my grandmother is rich, and I don't think she would care. Anyway, it's too late now!

I haven't heard from you yet about high scores for Starship Command, but I guess you're busy making new games. How about that catalog? I haven't got that yet either. Devon and his dumb friends can't even come close to my score now. I'm up to over 4,300,000 points now!

Do you plan on making any more battle or army games? These are the most fun.

Sincerely,

Danny Ross
3286 Willow Lane
Portland, OR 97211

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, Maryland, 21117

November 5, 1984

Dear Mr. Kilgore,

I'm a little surprised you haven't written back yet, what with the score I told you about. I now own twenty-eight cartridges and must be one of your best customers now, don't you think?

I got enough money for Commando Raid by playing Starship Command for money at the Video Arcade in the mall. These dumb kids owed me twenty-five dollars by the time I was done playing. Boy, are they dumb! One kid tried to hold out on me, but now he's sorry for it!

Some parents from my neighborhood want the Video Arcade closed because kids are spending too much time there, and getting bad grades. It seems to me that playing your games takes more brains and skill than doing homework, but I don't really go to the Arcade too much anymore, anyway. The kids there are afraid of me and won't bet anymore. Devon still goes there with the money his mom gives him, to get rid of him when her boyfriend comes over. Devon says the Master Video Company makes better games, but he's just jealous of my high scores. What a jerk!

I almost have enough to buy Battle Zone: I sold the two-volume dictionary my Aunt gave me for my birthday. Some girl at school bought it, and that gave me almost enough money for Battle Zone. I know my sister has eight dollars in her bank, but I haven't figured how to get it without her finding out. All she ever buys are gifts for mom and dad or her boyfriends, and they have enough already.

I'm expecting more games for Christmas, but dad says I play too much video and I should have other interests like sports. He says he will get me educational games if I insist on more video for Christmas. But I can always trade them in for the good games later.

Please send me an updated game catalog.

Sincerely,

Danny Ross,
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

Mr. Sidney Klein
Klein, Kaster, Johnson & Brummel, P.C.
1814 Front Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

November 10, 1984

Dear Sid,

I would appreciate your input with regard to a conceivably harmful situation that has arisen here at VV, Inc.

I've been receiving a series of letters over the year from a fourteen-year-old-kid in Oregon—letters that I thought nothing of at first, but which now seem to indicate progressively irresponsible, and possibly even aggressive, behavior on his part. This behavior seems to be directed towards his insistence upon having a complete set of our game cartridges, and being "the best" at all of our games.

I realize we are not liable should such a youngster actually do something illegal in order to fund this game collection, but would you agree that some correspondence from us is in order? Something indicating the need for moderation in the use of our product is what I had in mind, and I have enclosed a draft letter addressed to the child, for your perusal. Although I feel it is our responsibility to acknowledge the potential problems to be encountered through any misuse of our products, I don't want to make any sort of statement in a letter that might be viewed by either the child or the parent as an interference in a family matter by an outside party.

I would appreciate your reading the enclosed draft and letting me know what you think.

Yours truly,
Jim Kilgore
VV, Inc.

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, MD 21117

November 15, 1984

Dear Jim,

Your letter seems fine to me. I've indicated a few places where you might change the language a little, just so that VV, Inc. sounds a little less "preachy." After all, you don't want to stop selling games and cartridges altogether, right?

I wouldn't worry too much about the letters you've been receiving, or the less-than-ethical actions of your young video fan. Your company is not the first, nor will it be the last, video game manufacturer to be faced with this new "moral dilemma" of kids funding their recreational hobbies through somewhat devious means. It used to be comic books when I was a kid! Nevertheless, you are wise to attempt some sort of a response which: a) outlines the intent of the company to provide realistic play action for recreational time periods, and b) underscores the fact that video games, like any form of recreation, should be supervised by parents. The amount of time spent in playing the games should be limited, in other words, just as most parents demand in the case of television, to allow for schoolwork, chores, etc.

Send off your letter, addressed to the kid, then copy to the father if it appears the parents haven't seen the original. I don't think you'll hear any more from either party. Try not to worry. After all, the kid's only 14; what's the worst he can do?

If I don't see you before the holidays, all the best to yourself and Marjorie. We're off to Europe on the 14th of December for Christmas and New Year's with Jean's British cousins. Should be a jolly good time!

Yours,
Sid Klein

Danny Ross,
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

November 20, 1984

Dear Danny,

Thank you for your many letters during the year. As I mentioned in my first letter to you, we receive a tremendous amount of mail and are therefore not always able to reply personally. I have been impressed by your avid interest in our game cartridges and the very high scores you have achieved. Unfortunately, we have no way of recording high scores throughout the country due to the large numbers of games sold, and because there is no way of verifying the scores made by players across the country.

I have enclosed two more one-dollar discount coupons to aid you in your purchase of another Video Vision game cartridge. I would like to urge you, however, not to neglect your studies or your regular duties around the house. Your video games will always be ready for playing

and, unlike the case with television programs, you can play video games at any time. So, please don't neglect your schoolwork or chores around the house—do them before playing!

Even here at Video Vision, Inc., where fun is our main concern, we require that our employees, in both the design and marketing departments, have solid educational backgrounds and keen knowledge of how to deal with both people and business principles. So, stick to your studies—maybe you can be a video game designer some day!

I might also suggest that you look for some of the new video shops opening across the country that offer used cartridges at a substantial discount, or allow you to trade in the games you no longer play in exchange for new games on the market. This will allow you to buy the games more cheaply, without the need for borrowing money from your sister or placing bets at the local video arcade.

I hope you will take my comments for what they are intended to be: just helpful advice for a young man who certainly has the good sense to do what's best for himself and those close to him.

Again, thank you for your continued success with our video games, and do have a Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Jim Kilgore,
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, MD 21117

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, MD 21117

December 14, 1984

Mr. Kilgore:

I was very upset by your last letter. You sound more like my parents every day. I thought you were in business to sell video games. I hope your boss doesn't know what kind of letters you're sending to kids. You could be out of a job!

I'm returning your coupons. Two dollars is nothing compared to the kind of money I'm making now. I found out how easy it is to open the coin boxes of the video games over at the arcade. It's so simple to get in through the back door that I'm surprised they haven't been robbed before. Of course, I've been careful to hide away all my new games

(I've almost got a complete set now) and dad doesn't even know I've got them.

By the way, I gave my dad a copy of your letter. I bet you didn't think I would. I also told him you've been sending other letters all along. Now he's pretty upset, and says he will be writing you a letter soon.

Danny Ross,
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

P.S. The only part of your letter that interests me is where you suggested I become a designer of video games. I've given this some thought, and do have interesting ideas for games. But I think I'd rather have a job where I can write to other kids across the country and compare high scores. I think that maybe I'd like *your* job.

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinsville, MD 21117

December 16, 1984

Mr. Kilgore:

Just what are you trying to do by writing personal letters to my son and attempting to poison his mind against his mother and father?

I got my son to admit that you've been writing him ever since we bought that damn video system of yours last year. Obviously, you've been encouraging him to collect a complete set of your expensive games, with no regard as to how he gets the money.

I see that you finally realized I might be catching on to you, but that last condescending letter of yours didn't fool me. There's simply no interesting the boy in his studies or any other activities ever since you've sewn the seeds of video madness in his head!

Rest assured I'll be contacting a lawyer to sue you for everything your company has. I also intend to destroy my son's video system and all those mind-controlling cartridges you've been shoving down his throat.

It still amazes me that you have to stoop this low to sell a few games.
But *your* little game will soon be over.

Robert L. Ross
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

TELEGRAM TO: MR. SIDNEY L. KLEIN
C/O BISHOP'S HOTEL, RM. 302
LONDON, ENGLAND,
DECEMBER 18, 1984

LETTER TO KID HAS NEGATIVE EFFECT STOP FATHER
HAS THREATENED LAWSUIT STOP PLEASE CALL OR WRITE
PRIOR TO YOUR RETURN STOP

FROM: J.D. KILGORE
VIDEO VISION, INC.
923 HARBOR LANE
MARTINVILLE MD 21117
U.S.A.

TELEGRAM TO: MR. J.D. KILGORE
923 HARBOR LANE
MARTINVILLE MD. 21117
U.S.A.

WILL BE BACK JANUARY 12 STOP SAVE ALL
CORRESPONDENCE RELATED TO CASE STOP RELAX STOP
NO ONE SUES UNTIL AFTER HOLIDAYS STOP BEST TO YOU
AND MARJORIE STOP

FROM: SIDNEY L. KLEIN
C/O BRIGHTON BEACH HOTEL
BRIGHTON BEACH, ENGLAND

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
923 Harbor Lane,
Martinville, MD 21117

December 28, 1984

Dear JD,

I'm writing to inform you of an accident at our house recently. While grandmother was here for the holidays, she was walking up the stairs to her bedroom and slipped on an empty box from the new Asylum game cartridge I just bought. I don't know how it got on the stairs, but anyway, she fell down two flights and was killed instantly. Of course, I removed the empty box. I like to save them for the game instructions. I'm still not very happy with you lately, but I'd hate Video Visions to get in trouble with my dad, who's still talking about suing.

Dad says my sister and I should inherit thousands of dollars from grandmother's estate, but we won't get it until we're eighteen, unless something happens to both my mom and dad. My sister turns eighteen in a year or so.

Dad destroyed my original game system, like he said he would; of course, it was no problem buying replacement cartridges and another game module with the money I've been collecting from various sources. This time, the games are under lock and key, where dad can't find them.

My mom and dad just aren't the same lately, after grandmother died. They're drinking a lot more than they used to, and sometimes I think they'd be happier if they were dead like grandmother.

I'll see if I can talk them out of suing you, since I may be working for Video Vision myself one day, and I'd hate the company to lose lots of money in a lawsuit. Please send me your latest catalog.

Sincerely,

Danny Ross,
3286 Willow Lane,
Portland, OR 97211

Mr. J.D. Kilgore
Video Vision, Inc.
Martinville, MD 21117

January 2, 1985

Dear JD,

Well, this should be a happy new year for you after all. It turns out my dad won't be suing you now. I couldn't talk him out of it, but early New Year's day, a fire broke out in our house and the smoke killed my mom and dad before help could arrive. I suppose it was the drinking they'd done the night before that kept them sleeping so soundly they didn't smell the smoke. My sister wasn't in danger, because she was at a friend's house. But my room was totally destroyed, along with most of the house. For all anyone knew, I was in my room at the time.

Of course, I was really across the street in the park, watching. Unfortunately, my good pal Devon was sleeping over at our house that night, and I guess he didn't smell the smoke either. It's kind of funny that the firemen and police just assumed it was me, not Devon in that room. But then, I've heard that plastic burns really hot and fast, and with all my video cartridges in that room, it's not surprising that positive identification was difficult. Of course, there was really no reason for anyone to try especially hard—no one knew that Devon was staying over, not even his mother and her boyfriend, who were out partying, I guess. I suppose people will figure Devon to be a runaway, what with his family problems and all.

I'm glad my sister is all right. She will come into some big money before long, then I'll surprise her with a visit. Won't she be shocked when I show up!

By the way, you should really consider redesigning the wiring system of your game module. I found out it only takes a little cutting away of the insulation to expose hot wires. This could cause an accident if people are careful. I've got a new idea for another video game, called Firebug. I'll have to tell you about it when I drop by your office for a visit.

Sincerely,

Danny Ross,
Bayshore Motel,
Martinville, MD 21117



She was all alone in the house. What—or who—could be making those strange sounds?

A Little Imagination

by TRISHA SUNHOLM

JANET WAS JUST ABOUT TO STEP INTO THE BATH WHEN she heard a noise from outside the house.

It was just a tiny snap, no louder than a cricket's solitary chirp; the kind of noise a twig makes when someone steps on it.

She paused, one foot in the warm water while the other foot still rested on the cold tiles. Her eyes darted to the frosted window that partially screened the blackness of the night. Nothing could be seen; it was impossible to distinguish shadows from the backdrop of evening.

Holding her breath, she carefully listened for any further sounds from outside. There was only the usual distant barking of dogs and the eternal drone of suburban traffic.

The bubble-encrusted water rippled as she lowered herself into it, her mind whirling anxiously.

Was someone out there? she wondered. A burglar perhaps, scouting the house in search of an open window? She could just imagine him slipping into the house, creeping softly through the rooms, sifting through her jewelry and pocketing choice items.

Now, Janet, she chided herself, be rational. No burglar in his right mind would rob a house where someone was obviously awake, even if the person *was* having a bath. An empty house where the residents had gone out for the evening would be a far better choice. Why, both the Walshes on her left and the Linehams on her right had gone out for the evening; either of their houses would be a far more sensible choice.

She breathed a sigh of relief at her conclusions. As usual she was just letting her imagination run riot. The burglar of her mind was probably just a dog that had strayed in from the street.

Then she tsked in annoyance. The only way a dog could get into the yard was via an open gate. That meant that Ian, on his way to his regular Wednesday night card game, had left the driveway gates open again. Honestly! That man was always rushing about: from work to home, and from there to various meetings and clubs. While Janet didn't mind her husband's activities, she did get annoyed at his continual forgetfulness. He forgot to close gates, take out the garbage, post letters and a myriad of other little irritating things.

Oh well, as soon as she finished her bath she would go and lock the gates herself. No telling who could wander in: drunks, louts, rapists. Perhaps even a madman! Hadn't she just been reading about a girl who had been butchered with her own carving knife the other week? The woman hadn't been sexually assaulted—just horribly mutilated; apparently her murderer had killed just for the sake of killing. A real psychopath, the police said.

Her skin crept just at the thought of someone like that loose in the city.

The peace of the night air was suddenly ripped by a frenzied bout of barking coming from her own back neighbours' yard. Janet, recognising the high-pitched yapping of the Fletchers' poodle, Chien, felt vaguely disquieted.

What was disturbing the dog? If Chien was barking at a strange dog in her backyard, then surely there should be two dogs barking furiously, and not just one. She had never known a dog to stay quiet when another dog was barking at it.

The aged voice of Mrs. Fletcher drifted into the bathroom. "Chien! Come inside! What's got into you, making such a racket at this time of the night?"

There were a few sullen yaps off the poodle and then the sound of a

door closing.

All became quiet again.

JANET MECHANICALLY RESUMED SOAPING HER BODY, her mind a tangle of thoughts. Obviously whoever, or whatever, had broken the twig a short time ago was not a dog. Perhaps it had been a cat—yes, a cat that had fled silently when Chien scared it. Or perhaps it had been . . . a madman.

Her ever-ready imagination flared into life at this last thought. Immediately the hard lines of the bathroom were eclipsed by a series of vivid images. Helpless against their strength, she was forced to watch the workings of her own imagination.

In her mind she saw a lean, coat-clad figure stealthily slip through their open gates and steal across their front lawn. Then slowly, ever so carefully, the man moved among the dark shadows at the side of the house, bending his head to avoid the overhanging branches. Then, in a moment of carelessness, his shoe snapped a fallen branch that lay in his path. The man froze, listening intently for any sign of alarm from inside the house. At the first hint of danger he would flee across the garden and melt into the shadows of the street again. But there had been no cry of suspicion and so, reassured, he continued his scouting of the house . . .

She forced herself to laugh. How ridiculous she was, always letting her imagination run away with her. Smiling, she remembered the time when she had awakened her husband at two o'clock in the morning, convinced the house was on fire. How angry Ian had been when he discovered that the crackling of flames Janet swore she heard was merely the pages of a newspaper rustling in the breeze coming through the open kitchen window.

What! Was that another twig snapping? No—no, of course not! It was just her imagination again!

She forced her mind back into the past again. She'd never forget the time when she had been sure someone was tapping on the bedroom window late one night. How frightened she had been—until she found out that the sinister tapping had belonged to a branch of their oak tree, stirred into action by a night wind.

Shh! What was that noise? . . . It was nothing. Just her mind again.

YES, SHE HAD TO ADMIT IT—THERE HAD BEEN NUMEROUS other occasions where her imagination had taken everyday noises and painted over them until they represented distorted events—events she had genuinely believed to be true! Ian always said her imagination

would get her into trouble one day. Or night.

Well, she would try really hard to behave sensibly tonight. No more impassioned phone calls to the police station, begging them to apprehend a midget prowler. How embarrassing that particular episode had been! The prowler had turned out to be a large dog, sniffing inquisitively at the side of the house! Like that . . . dog? . . . tonight.

With a nervous little laugh, she lay back in the foamy water, softly humming as she washed her arms.

A loud creak followed by a scraping sound made her abruptly sit up.

What was that?

It sounded like it came from the bedroom! Like something moved. Wood against wood . . . The bedroom window! That was just the type of noise the window made when someone opened it!

Unbidden, a series of pictures sprang into her mind to go with the noise: she saw the madman, as she labeled him, carefully sliding open the unlocked side window to their bedroom. For the first few centimetres the window glided easily and then, suddenly, it resisted, age having warped its frame a fraction. The man had to tense his muscles and push harder. Creaking in protest, the window finally opened wider. After a brief glance around the yard, the madman hoisted himself onto the windowsill and eased his body into the room.

Tingles of fear swept her body, to be quickly replaced by anger. Honestly, she rebuked herself in annoyance, couldn't she ever stop this stupid imagination from scaring herself yet again? Maybe her mother had been right when she said that mental illnesses began with the surrendering of reality for fantasy. She had to get a grip on herself now, before she drowned her sanity in her own frightening illusions.

She had to concentrate on the real world, on everyday matters. That was it! She would concentrate on the solid points of her life, such as cooking. Now, that was a nice safe topic to think about. She really enjoyed cooking; the pleasure of taking a mixture of ingredients and transforming them into delectable meals was a continuous delight to her. Ian was constantly praising her cooking; a fine wife, he often said as he patted his stomach after dinner.

Yes, she tried to be a good wife. They had only been married two years, but that was long enough for her to develop her skills in home-making. Cooking, sewing, gardening, even redecorating when required. She had just finished painting the dining-room walls a pale blue, and the ceiling cream. Maybe she would paint their bedroom next. She considered the idea now. It was only a small bedroom, crowded with a huge pinewood cupboard and dresser, a queen size bed and two small side-tables. Near the window—no, she would not think

of it being open!—was a spreading philodendron, its pot precariously balanced on a narrow table.

What was *that*?

Was that a thud from the bedroom? It sounded like something heavy falling to the floor—like a pot plant being knocked off a stand by an unsuspecting intruder! . . . No, she thought, that was nonsense! It was just her wretched imagination again. She had to stop hearing an innocent noise and immediately attaching a sinister picture to it!

She forced herself to resume her ponderings about redecorating the bedroom.

Yes, the wallpaper was definitely faded in places. She had never liked it even when they first bought the house. However their money had been needed for other, more urgent, repairs; the electrical wiring had to be replaced within their first year there, and a new sewer main had been needed. That had been an expensive job! Then—

A click!

Janet's heart started beating faster.

THAT HAD DEFINITELY SOUNDED LIKE A CLICK COMING from the kitchen! No, she was just being silly again! Her mind whirled furiously. Then what had it been? She must be sensible. It could have been anything—perhaps one of those noisy armoured insects flinging itself against the window; a light—no!; a cat landing with a thud on the roof; the light switch . . . no! Don't think of that! A mouse knocking something over in the kitchen.

Only they didn't have mice.

Maybe the noise had come from outside the house. Perhaps it had been one of Mrs. Fletcher's grandchildren, throwing a stone at the back of their house.

Hardly.

She wished Ian would come home. If only she was somewhere else tonight, instead of at home all alone.

Alone?

Was she alone?

Oh, dear God! she cried silently to herself. Why did she keep torturing herself with these ridiculous paranoid fears? She was a grown woman, normally even-minded except for this one little area. A little area that, at the moment, was tempting her to climb out of the bathroom window and flee screaming to a neighbour's house.

Ha! Wouldn't that make her the laughing stock of the neighbourhood? A neurotic woman who fled at the slightest unidentified noise!

She was pathetic! she told herself. Imagine being nearly reduced to

tears by an innocent little click. So what if it sounded like an old kitchen light being switched on! No doubt there were a thousand other things it also resembled. For example, it could have been a . . . a . . . now, why couldn't she think of something else it could have been? Why did she persist in thinking of that wretched light switch?

Slowly she took a few deep breaths, making a conscious effort to relax the agitated thuds of her heart. She stared at the wall that separated the bathroom from the kitchen.

There was no one in there, of course. If only her mind would stop showing her the vision of a muscular man standing silently in the kitchen doorway, his hand on the light switch, and his eyes slowly scanning the room.

What could he be looking for?

Damn! She was doing it again! Quick! Think of something else. Anything to get her mind away from that image!

The bathroom! Yes, the bathroom would do!

Desperately her eyes swept the little room, seeking an antidote to the ravings of her imagination. How stark the bathroom looked with its sterile white tiles and pale yellow towels. Insipid. No life in it at all. Except for her. She smiled wanly at her own sick joke. Seriously, though, the room was badly in need of redecoration.

A vivid colour was needed to make it come alive, to give it more personality and warmth. Blue, perhaps, or green. No, they were both cool colours. Pink? Maybe. But pink was essentially a woman's colour. She couldn't see Ian relishing bathing in a pink bathroom. Red, then. Yes! Red was such a bright colour, so forceful and proud. She could buy some red curtains and towels, and even some red mats. How stunning the room would then look—basically white with its contrasting splashes of red.

Shh! That noise! From the kitchen! It sounded—no, it couldn't—but it—was it? The sound of a drawer being slid open? Janet's eyes were wide with horror as she stared at the bathroom wall, for in her mind she saw, not the wall, but a frighteningly different scene. A scene where a wild-eyed man was slowly pulling open her kitchen drawers. Searching for something. But what? The first and second drawers were disappointing, for their contents yielded nothing but butter knives, forks, spoons, spatulas, and the usual collection of kitchen paraphernalia. But the third drawer: perfect! A glittering array of carving knives, chopping knives and, dominating the display, a gleaming butcher's knife. She saw the man breathe heavily in delight as he lifted the knife from its position—did she just hear a clink of steel?—and hold it in his leather-gloved hands, his crazed eyes admiring its fine, razor-sharp

edge.

TEARS OF FRIGHT AND ANGER SPRANG TO HER EYES. SHE must be going mad! How *could* she go on doing this to herself? Conjuring up vile fantasies that threatened to reduce her to an hysterical fool who ran around the neighbourhood babbling about non-existent murderers and butcher's knives!

She had to get a grip on reality for her own sake, and Ian's. Ian! Imagine—no, don't use that horrible word!—just think of his reaction if he saw her now: his pretty little wife red-eyed from weeping over her own delusions. Surely he would start to wonder about her mental stability and, harbouring those kind of doubts, it would only be a matter of time before he withdrew from her. No! That must never happen!

Be calm . . . be calm . . . be calm . . .

With a supreme effort she stilled the violent shaking of her body and stood up, the bath water sliding off her body in little rivulets. Stepping onto the cold tiles, she took a thick towel and wiped herself dry, mentally talking to herself all the time.

A drive. She would take a long drive and get away from the house for a few hours. No, she couldn't do that, for how could she get up the courage to go out into the dark to get to the garage?

See how stupid she was becoming? she scolded herself. Too scared to even leave the house. In fact, she was too scared to even leave the bathroom! The thought of opening the door and seeing—No, no, no, NO! There would be nothing there! Only the usual blackness of the hall!

The tin of talcum powder slipped from her fingers and fell with a clatter to the floor. Shh! Picking it up, she quickly dusted her body with it and then wrapped the towel tightly around her, tucking it securely under her armpits.

She looked at the closed door.

Time to go, time to leave the bathroom and face an empty house. How incredibly stupid she was going to feel when she saw that her bedroom window was still closed—she must lock it immediately!—and the kitchen light off, with all her cutlery drawers undisturbed. Yes, she would feel stupid, but tremendously relieved too.

Reaching out for the doorknob, she paused, her fingers suspended in mid-air. Was that a sound she heard coming from the other side of the door? The sound of someone breathing heavily?

A knot of steel tightened around her heart as she held her breath and strained her ears. It was the merest whisper of a sound—if, indeed, it existed at all.

But what if it did exist?

PANIC THUNDERED THROUGH HER BODY AS SHE TOOK A step away from the door. Helplessly, she visualised herself opening the door to see the madman. He would be standing there grinning wildly at her, his upraised hand holding the gleaming butcher's knife. Then, with incredible swiftness, before the first scream of terror had even left her throat, the knife would descend with a rush of air and hack into her breast. A torrent of blood would spurt from the gaping wound and, screaming in agony, she would fall to the floor. The psychopath would laugh in delight as he swung his arm up and down, up and down, hacking away at her bloodied body. At last, with a final swing, he would impale the butcher's knife in her stomach and flee the scene before anyone, attracted by her cries, came knocking on the front door. Inside the house, Janet would lie dead, her hideously mutilated body sprawled in a pool of blood, the white bathroom walls decorated with violent red splashes.

Petrified by the power of her own images, she swayed and clutched at the door for support. Her right hand accidentally grasped the doorknob. She stood there, tears of fear trickling down her cheeks, one hand on the doorknob, the other hand still clutching the towel around her.

Enough! She was not going to listen to the ravings of her own mind any longer! She had to open that door! The sooner she did, the sooner she would conquer her vile imagination. Come on! she ordered herself. Do it! Start counting, and when she got to ten, fling the bathroom door open. *Come on!*

One, two, three—oh dear God! dear God!—four, five—no! no! no . . . oh . . . !—six, seven, eight—please, someone, get help!—n . . . nine . . . ten!

Now!

Janet wrenched the door open and saw a wild-eyed man grinning insanely at her, his upraised hand holding a gleaming butcher's knife.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Who were the Jets and the Sharks?

Rival gangs in the movie West Side Story.

Mike Shayne Mystery Makers

JOHN SOENNICHSEN (*The Video Fan*) says:

I am 32 years old, live in Portland with my wife Marilyn and three-year-old daughter Heidi. I am Associate Editor of the Oregon State Bar Bulletin, and have been employed in similar writing and editing positions previously. This story will be the first to be published in a consumer publication, although I have a fantasy novel circulating among publishers currently and my fingers are crossed. And yes—I do like to play video games!

☆ ☆ ☆

STEPHEN PAUL DeVILLO (*The Train*) tells us:

I am 28 years old, a lifetime resident of New York and a veteran subway buff, with a longtime interest in the history and folklore of New York. The Phantom Subway Train and the Forgotten Passenger of 18th St. are not, so far as I know, part of the current folklore of New York, but rather inventions of my own. "The Train" is my first published work of fiction.

☆ ☆ ☆

TRISHA SUNHOLM (*A Little Imagination*) is a writer who lives in Sidney, New South Wales, Australia. She has had stories published in magazines in Australia, Great Britain, and South Africa.

A prime rule of subway riding was: Let sleeping drunks lie. Anderson ignored this. After all, it was a long, lonely wait—and what was the harm of it?

The Train

by STEPHEN PAUL DeVILLO

A DISTANT MECHANICAL VOICE GAVE TOM ANDERSON the bad news as he paused with his hand on the bannister, and the muffled roar that followed confirmed it. Pushing through the turnstile, he peered down the tunnel only to see a receding shadow reveal a row of red signal lights stretching into the murky distance.

Swearing softly to himself, Anderson checked his watch, and took stock of his situation. It was 2:45 AM in the 96th Street IND station, and he had just missed the uptown AA local. Cursing his luck, he could see ahead a long tiresome wait. Service was fitful at best on the Independent Line in the early morning hours, and what with a change

of trains at 125th Street, it could well be ninety minutes before he made it back home. Anderson considered bolting the station and trying for a cab on Broadway or Central Park West, but his evening activities had so depleted his funds as to make this option, thin as it was, impossible. As it was, it would likely take as long to find a cab willing to drive to the Bronx as it would to wait for the train. And to top things off he did not even have a newspaper.

At the age of forty-three Anderson no longer had the boundless energy of a younger man, and he was now dog-tired and eager to be home. Moreover, he could not shake the congestive feeling that had been growing in his chest since late afternoon, a strange feeling that the whiskey for once had done nothing to relieve. *Some new variety of the flu*, Anderson thought; *bet I'll be the first on the block to have it*.

He looked at his surroundings. 96th Street was an all too familiar station, one that Anderson had spent far too much time in over the years, thanks to the steadily deteriorating service of a subway that fifty years before had been the joy of the upper West Side. The token booth was set in a narrow corridor and hidden from view of most of the platform, thus leaving the clerk free to ponder the latest issue of his favorite muscle magazine and not otherwise have to concern himself with the doings of those who already had paid their fares. Along the platform, a white tiled wall showed gaps where tiles had fallen out over the years, never to be replaced, and which at regular intervals sported peeling advertisements beneath mosaic inscriptions announcing the location of the station. Facing the platform was a row of grime-caked steel pillars, at one end of which a trickle of seepage fell from the ceiling to join a sluggish stream of bilgewater between the rails. The drip of the seepage echoed in the dead silence of a place long abandoned by sensible people.

Anderson took all this in, and turned to stare down the tunnel, hoping for some glimpse of a coming train that would promise relief from his growing impatience and boredom. A veteran subway rider for most of his adult life, he was skilled in the arcane wisdom of the underground. He even knew many of the legends of the system, his favorite being the forgotten passenger of the abandoned 18th Street IRT station, whose skeleton was found clutching a yellowed copy of the New York Sun, dated the day the station was closed up back in 1945

But far more practical wisdom was that employed in detecting the approach of far distant trains, as if such knowledge would somehow speed their arrival. Peering down the dark tunnel, Anderson thought he spied a faint pinpoint of light far away, which he knew could be the

first gleam of light on the rail from a moving train. But after a couple of minutes, he could see that the light was not growing any bigger or brighter, so he turned to the wall to look at a movie ad that caught his eye. The poster turned out to be for a half-star turkey that had gone to the forgettable film vault within a week of its premiere, a movie that it was too late to see, and one that Anderson had never intended to see in the first place.

Unlike the Lone Ranger, Anderson could not go down and put his ear on the rail, but when he heard a loud clank issue from the tracks he knew what it was just as sure as if Tonto had informed him. A minute later he knew that it wasn't, and he uttered an impatient oath while stamping his foot upon the unyielding concrete. This action did not make the local train appear either, but it did wake up a hitherto unnoticed wino who lay curled up on the wooden bench cradling a half empty bottle of Night Train. Rubbing his eyes, the wino regarded the red faced Anderson with a bemused look, chuckled, and informed him that, "I know what you be lookin' for, but what you seein' ain't it!"

Now I've gone and woke up the peanut gallery, Anderson thought as he turned to stare down the tunnel, more anxious than ever to be away. *The last thing I need to cap this splendid evening: a wino.* Such were the subterranean inhabitants that Anderson, and other riders like him, knew all too well. *At least, he thought, it's autumn, and the derelicts don't smell quite as bad now as they do in the winter and spring.* The awakened wino shook his ill-kempt head, and treated himself to an eye-opener from his diminishing vintage while gazing at Anderson with a look of soggy contemplation.

"Ya know, mistah," he piped up, "I been down here a lot longer than you. In fact I was born the very year this here line was opened up. Very same year that Franklin Dee-lan-o Roosevelt got elected and tole the people that . . ." The wino took a swallow and cleared his throat for his FDR impersonation, which he thought he was very good at. Anderson, ready to clutch at straws, took heart at a puff of warm air from the tunnel, the surest sign that a train was at last approaching. But the puff only announced the full speed passage of the "A" Express on the far track. Anderson stared at the speeding train with a dismayed feeling. Roosevelt's inaugural was lost in the roar, but the wino had taken another cue.

"That be the A Train to Harlem, the one Duke Ellington used to ride!" he announced, launching himself into humming a cracked rendition of "Take the A Train." Anderson now knew why Duke Ellington never wrote "Take the CC Train to the Bronx," or "Take the AA Local to 125th Street." He most likely wanted to, but grew tired

waiting for the thing to show up.

The wino broke off in mid bar to behold an unamused Anderson again staring down the track. "Huh. That light you keep seein' ain't no train you want to see, an' you better hope it don't come this way." *True enough*, Anderson thought as he watched a rat perched on top of the second rail. A brown Norwegian Rat was a good substitute for Tonto: as soon as the rat felt a vibration on the rail, he would jump off and dive for cover. This Anderson knew from long observations of subway wildlife was a sure sign of a train's approach. The creatures were good at predicting earthquakes and ship sinkings as well. But as it was, the rat just continued sauntering unconcernedly along the rail, confirming the sad suspicion that there was no train in the near distance.

The wino knew he had a captive audience. At least it beat talking to the statues in Central Park, so he continued. "Yep, some folks I know is already on that train. An' I don't want to see 'em, or join in with 'em. They ain't goin' nowhere. Ain't goin' to Harlem, ain't goin' to Brooklyn. Ain't goin' nowhere."

ANDERSON WELL KNEW THAT ONE OF THE PRIME RULES of subway riding was never to engage a derelict in conversation. If you do you first get the life story, plus a description of last night's delirium tremens, then an urgent request for funds, which one would pay in order to avoid an embarrassing scene and get the fellow off your back. But that last bit of information startled him into taking the risks and breaking the rule. "You know something?" he asked, "Train stalled, derailment? They make an announcement before I got here?"

The wino paused in mid-libation. "They ain't announce nothin', mistah. They never announce nothin'. I just *know*, sure as I know those folks ain't never gettin' off, sure as I know I don't never want to get on."

Well, that's what I get for asking a wino, Anderson thought. *He could care less about the service, since to him one station is much the same as another, and as long as he has a dry spot to sleep, he wouldn't be bothered if the whole system fell apart. Which it is bound to do any day now.*

With a light stomp of the foot, Anderson turned back to the tunnel, taking a few more steps away from the philosopher of the rails. This only excited the wino, who lept up with a desperate edge to his boozed-ravaged voice.

"Look here, fool, them lights you keep seein', them noises you keep hearin'. They ain't no real train. It's the train folks like you always

think they see and never comes. It's the Phantom Subway Train. That train be full of the spirits of folks who died down here. It go round an' round all the time, an' it never stop, 'cept when someone die. An' then nobody get off, jus' someone get on—an' if it stop for *you*, then you is dead!"

His speech finished, the wino shrugged his shoulders and returned to his bench. The statues were better listeners, he thought; none of these nice clean people wanted to hear any of his stories. Before curling up again he took a nightcap from his bottle. Their problem, he figured.

Anderson smiled at the retreating wino, thankful in a way for a subway story he had never heard before, and even more thankful for the train that had suddenly appeared seemingly out of nowhere. Anderson had failed to spot it at first, since the headlights were very dim, and the colored running lights were out. Moreover, it was made up of a motley collection of old cars salvaged from the IRT trainyards, which being narrower than the cars made to run on the Independent Line, left an eight-inch gap between the doors and the platform edge. *Typical Toonerville Trolley setup*, Anderson fumed; *someone is bound to get killed falling into the gap*. But by that point he would have been happy with a handcar. He briskly stepped over the gap and into the open door, ignoring the sleeping storyteller on the bench, for another prime rule of subway riding read: *Let sleeping drunks lie*.

AT 3:07 THE TOKEN CLERK, ALERTED BY THE WINO, called the paramedics from St. Luke's Hospital, who arrived ten minutes later, too late to do anything for Tom Anderson, dead of a massive coronary. The clerk, secure in his bullet-proof booth, could only think of a graffito inscribed on the opposite wall: a drawing of a monument of some kind, labeled, "To those who died waiting . . ." The paramedics asked the wino when it happened, but he had no idea, being asleep at the time. He didn't have much else to say, so he slipped away to enjoy the new-found windfall of \$2.63 he had rifled from Anderson's pockets, muttering something about the train he was glad he missed.

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

What was the nickname of Martha Jane Canary Burke?

Said to have been married twelve times, she was better known as Calamity Jane.

He was going to die a horrible death. The statistics told him so!

Long Odds

by TERRY BLACK

HAVE YOU EVER MET A PERSON WHO LOOKED LIKE HE was dead?

That's how I felt when Grant Kenmore walked into my office. He looked awful. His eyes had shopping bags under them; his mouth was pinched, his nose was red, and there was something growing in his hair. His clothes looked like he not only slept in them but did yardwork and went jogging, too.

I don't like to be rude, but I honestly couldn't help it. I gaped and said, "Jeez, fella; what's wrong with you?"

He shambled over and sat down heavily. "I'm going to die," he said.

I coughed and looked away, regretting my boldness. "I'm sorry," I said. "Uh . . . how long do you have?"

"I don't know," he said slowly. "Hard to tell."

"Well, with advances in medical science—"

"No, you don't get it," he broke in. "I'm not sick. I'm going to be killed. Horribly."

"Pardon?"

"I'm going to be killed horribly. On a airplane. That's why I came here, to Continental Mutual. I want to insure myself for a million dollars."

I coughed again, trying to put it all together. My first thought was this guy had some trouble upstairs, and he ought to be talking to someone of a different profession. But something told me there was more to it than that. I decided to play for time.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Grant Kenmore."

"K-E-N-M-O-R-E," I said, writing it down. "Nice meeting you. I'm Marv Drexler, Claims Adjustments."

"Wonderful. Now can we write the damn policy while I'm still around to sign it?"

I hesitated. "You say you're about to die?"

"Right."

"Well, that's sort of a problem," I explained. "We're not going to insure someone at death's door. I'm surprised you're even telling me this."

"Oh, you won't believe me," he said confidently. "You'll think I'm a nut and write up the policy, and you won't even remember me when it happens. But at least the wife'll get some compensation."

I bridged my fingers and posed the big question: "What makes you think you're going to die?"

"Statistics."

"I don't follow you."

"Nobody does. They think I'm a walking nut case. But it's true, just the same—statistically I'm bound to die, and soon."

"I'll show you." He reached into a pocket of his coat and pulled out a stack of rumpled sheets. All were covered with a smudged figures, written in pencil. "According to FAA records, a total of seventy-five bombs have exploded on commercial airlines. Thirty-eight of those occurred in the past ten years.

"Now, that's pretty small compared to the total number of flights, which is twenty-one thousand per day in the US alone. If you ballpark the probability of suffering an airborne explosion on any given flight, it comes to about one chance in 14.8 million."

"Sounds pretty unlikely to me."

"Of course—for most people. But I'm a special case, you see. I'm a courier for a multinational conglomerate. I fly constantly, day and night, all over the world—and I've been doing it for thirty-five years."

He spoke faster and faster now, with a fervor bordering on hysteria.

"I figure it comes to over fifty thousand flights, nearly a quarter of a million hours aloft. I've probably got the world's record for airborne miles. But that's not the worst of it." He dug into his sheets, frowning. "Do you know anything about actuarial tables?"

"A bit," I admitted. After all, this *was* an insurance company.

"Well, I've been computing them for aircraft bombing victims." He swiped a hand through his hair. "And I find that people with certain jobs, of a certain age, with a certain ethnic background are more likely to be blown up than others. A diplomat, for example, is twelve times likelier than a schoolteacher."

He made a dramatic pause.

"When you correct for a person of my age, occupation and

background, the odds drop to one in half a million. And the number of flights I've already made are statistically significant. My risk increases with each new flight; sooner or later I'm bound to be killed. It's just a matter of time."

"Why not take the bus?"

"Across the ocean?"

"Or quit."

"I need this job. It's the only thing I know." He slumped back in his chair, looking thoroughly miserable.

I pulled out a blank policy and reached for my fountain pen. *Candy from a baby*, I thought, testing the ink. But I hesitated. The poor guy looked so pathetic, sitting there trapped by his arithmetic—and it would be so easy to cheer him up. I hated to spoil a perfect contract, but I couldn't bear to keep my mouth shut.

So I laid the pen aside and said, "You're wrong."

"What?"

"You're wrong. You've misunderstood the laws of probability. Can I straighten you out here?"

He didn't answer, which I took as a yes. "It's a common error, Mr. Kenmore. You see, each new flight is a separate event, independent of all others. The odds of a bomb exploding on your next trip are no better than on your last trip, or the trip before that or before that! Each is a brand-new occurrence, regardless of the past. Your obsession is a mathematical fallacy."

"Thanks," he said wearily. "For trying to cheer me up. But it's no use. I've worked too hard on this, checked it too carefully. I know I'm going to die."

I tried to insist, but it was hopeless; Kenmore only shook his head. In spite of everything I told him, he was convinced that his only future was a fiery exploding death.

I shouldn't complain. I got a hell of a policy out of him, with a whopping commission. But I hated to watch as he shambled out of the office, head down and shoulders slumped, a sad and defeated man.

I DIDN'T SEE HIM AGAIN UNTIL THREE MONTHS LATER.

It was half past ten on a Friday morning, in the main lobby of LaGuardia Airport. I was headed back to LA after a weekend seminar on envelope-stuffing and I had two hours until my next flight. So I wandered around, browsing magazines and eyeballing the stews until I noticed him, there in the corner.

Those months had done Kenmore a world of good. He'd cleaned himself up, put on a little weight, invested in some nice new clothes. He

looked oddly comfortable in that hard plastic seat, legs crossed, head back, savoring a cigar. He was grinning like a cat in an aviary.

"Mr. Kenmore!" I said, veering over to say hello. He looked over and threw me a smile that could have lit up Cleveland.

"You're that insurance fella," he said, stabbing a finger at me. "Marv Somebody."

"Drexler," I said, shaking his hand. "How are you these days?"

"Never better," he said, beaming. His whole posture was different; he was brighter, bouncier, practically bursting with *joie de vivre*. You could have starred him in a soft drinks commercial. "And yourself?"

"Fine, fine." I slid into the seat next to him. "Still flying around the world?"

"Constantly. I've logged almost three thousand flights since you saw me last."

"Travel seems to agree with you."

"Thanks."

There was an awkward silence. I wondered how to ask the big question; there was no graceful way to broach the subject. Finally I decided to just jump in and hope for the best.

"Still worried about the bombings, Mr. Kenmore?"

He shrugged and said, "No."

"Well, why not? The last time I saw you you were ready for last rites, now you're on top of the world. What brought you around?"

"I had an idea," he confided.

"What do you mean?"

"LAST CALL FOR FLIGHT 402," said an amplified voice. "PITTSBURGH, LOUISVILLE, DALLAS/FORT WORTH."

"That's me," he said, climbing to his feet. "Sorry I can't stay."

"But what was your idea?"

"Well, I got to thinking," he said, shrugging into his topcoat. "About how many flights I had to go before the final jackpot. And suddenly it hit me: the odds of a bomb on the very next airplane were frighteningly high . . ."

He stubbed out his cigar.

"But what are the odds of *two* bombs on that plane?"

He wheeled around and hurried for the boarding gate before I could say anything. I tried to yell "What do you mean?" but he was already out of earshot, hustling forward, elbowing through the crowd—

—clutching a baggage ticket in a white-knuckled hand. ●

There was just an old lady living in the house. It would be easy pickings for the three punks to take what they wanted!

The Yankee Lady

by L. A. NERWINSKI

“CAR FIVE, C’MON. C’MON CAR FIVE.”

I set my styrofoam cup on the dash and picked up the mike. We’re not supposed to use CB talk on the police channel, but at this time of night everything sort of eases up.

“This is Fiver. C’mon, Louise.”

“Car Five, code blue at the Rice place. That’s code blue. Acknowledge.”

“Ten-four, Louise. What’s happening, c’mon?” I backed the Plymouth out of the Seven-Eleven’s parking lot and onto Route 54.

“Velma Hapgood saw lights. Phoned from the hospital when she arrived. Best get out there fast, Rufe. Station out.”

"Ten-four. Fiver out."

I turned on the flasher and mashed the pedal; the speedometer shot to eighty-five and stayed there, there not being any traffic on 54. The Rice place was five miles away.

Most folks who live in small towns dislike the way everybody knows everybody else's business, but you can't deny that it makes police work a lot easier. Mrs. Rice—Ella Riordan Rice—was a young Yankee lady when she married the local mill owner's son forty-five years ago and settled in Sanders Corners. She had been a widow for ten years now but still lived in the old mansion, a mile from the nearest neighbor. She wasn't rich any more, but she was still quality.

She hadn't any help except a girl who came in during the afternoon and left when she finished washing up after supper. Everybody in town knew that after supper Mrs. Rice listened to the radio until nine o'clock and then went to bed. She never stayed up past that unless she had company, and Velma Hapgood would know if she had company. I hoped there was no real trouble.

JUST BEFORE THE GRAVEL ROAD THAT TURNS OFF TO THE Rice place my headlights picked up a gleam of chrome that hadn't ought to be there, and I slowed for a look. A Chevy camper with an out-of-state tag was half hidden in some kudzu next to the ditch. That looked suspicious.

I cut my flasher and lights as I turned down the gravel road; you can see the Rice place from the highway, and I squinted through the bugs on my windshield. No lights, no cars; nothing. Still nothing as I drove up to the old house. I eased the Plymouth around back and got out, my flashlight in my left hand, my .357 loose in its holster.

As soon as I took a look around I saw two things: the screen door hanging by one hinge, and a man lying in a patch of moonlight beside a corner of the house. I went to the man first.

He was young. He wore dungarees and a country-and-western shirt with the sleeves cut off at the shoulders. He had long yellow hair tied back in a pony tail, and his small blue eyes were wide open, as if something had surprised the hell out of him. A wire dangled beside the house. Then I saw another loose wire hanging from the second floor. When I saw the tin snips on the grass next to him I shone my flashlight on his hands: they were charred meat.

It was so dumb I could scarcely believe I was seeing it. He—or somebody—had cut the telephone line; then he had started cutting the electrical power line with his tin snips, near where it enters the house. The tin snips were the old-fashioned kind, with long, bare handles. He

was grounded. As soon as his snips bit into the copper core he got a shot of two-twenty through the handles. As he jerked and fell he pulled on the partially cut line and snapped it. The house was now without any telephone or electricity, but he was dead—electrocuted. He deserved it for being that dumb.

He did not force the screen door off its hinge *after* electrocuting himself, and I didn't think even he had been dumb enough to break in first and try to cut off the electricity second. So he wasn't alone. I drew my revolver and walked quietly to the screen door.

Through the screen door I saw that the back door itself was standing wide open; my flashlight showed me that the jamb had been torn up near the latch. I moved the screen door out of the way without making too much noise and went into the kitchen.

I shot my light around the room, the muzzle of my revolver following the beam. The beam stopped at something big and black lying on the floor.

As I drew closer I saw it was Mrs. Rice's Labrador dog, with his head bashed in and blood and brains spattered on the lighted circle of linoleum. The pry bar that killed the dog—there was blood on it, and black hairs—lay a little to one side. I hadn't heard a sound inside the house so far.

I went through the doorway that led into the rest of the house. Still no lights, no sound. I went ahead, using my flashlight as little as possible and bumping into furniture; the rooms were pitch dark and crammed with every kind of table and chair that ever got into the way of a big-footed country constable trying to be quiet.

After a minute I found I was at the foot of the hall stairs. Then I heard a crash that shook the house, followed by screams.

THE NOISE CAME FROM UPSTAIRS, AND UPSTAIRS I RAN like a rabbit, my flashlight lighting the way. At the top of the stairs I saw a light spilling out the door of one of the rooms and ran to it.

In the room I saw Mrs. Rice, in a white cotton night-gown; also a big electric lantern on the floor; also a boy who could have been the twin brother of the dead boy outside, except for the pony tail. He held Mrs. Rice around the arms from behind, and pulled her this way and that.

Behind them a big old cabinet had been tipped over onto the floor. It was tilted up at one corner, and the screams were coming from under the cabinet. That puzzled me, but I didn't stop to give it any thought right then.

"This is the police," I said as I raised my gun and stepped inside. "Let the lady loose."

He looked at me and pulled an Army .45 from his belt with one hand while he tried to hold Mrs. Rice with the other. He started to say something, but at that instant Mrs. Rice jammed her elbow deep into his stomach. He grunted and slackened his hold a little. She spun herself free and dropped to the floor, face down. Quick as a snake the boy raised his .45. We both fired.

His bullet went high, taking a piece out of the doorframe over my head. My bullet took him in the chest and knocked him backward, head-over-heels over the edge of the cabinet. He lay still on the other side.

After making sure he was dead I went over to Mrs. Rice and helped her off the floor. The screams from under the cabinet had turned into soft, gurgling moans.

When she was on her feet she said, "It's Constable Trumbull, is it not?"

"Yes m'am. Are you all right?"

"Certainly, Constable." Her lower lip was trembling, but she didn't seem to be hurt. I was shaking all over.

The moans from under the cabinet stopped. I steered Mrs. Rice over to a chair and sat her down. Then I took a deep breath and went to the cabinet.

A third boy was under the cabinet. I started to raise it, but it hardly budged; it was about seven foot long by four wide, and it weighed a couple of hundred pounds. I had to smile.

"Did you push this cabinet over, Mrs. Rice?"

"Yes: Is my china very badly damaged?"

I grunted and heaved at the cabinet until I pulled it off the boy. He was pale and unconscious, but he was still breathing.

I led Mrs. Rice outside to my car and made her get in the front seat; then I radioed for an ambulance. I left her in the car and went back to the house. At the back door I turned to look at her. She was sitting up very straight.

THE BOY FROM UNDER THE CABINET LIVED AND GAVE US
a statement. What with that and what Mrs. Rice told us, we know it happened this way.

The three boys were passing through town on their way to Florida, looking for things to steal. Late in the afternoon they spotted the Rice place, and it looked like easy pickings to them, since they saw only an old lady and a girl around. They hid their camper off the road and kept in the trees behind the house until dark. Then the girl drove away. They waited a couple of hours, in case the girl came back. She didn't, and at

eleven o'clock they went ahead with their plan.

Their plan was to cut the power and telephone cables (so the old lady couldn't phone for help or see them well enough to identify them) and ransack the house. While cutting the lines one of them managed to electrocute himself, and it made the other two mad as hell against the person who lived in the house—as if their ignorance was Mrs. Rice's fault, I suppose.

The remaining two boys forced the back door, killed Mrs. Rice's dog—who naturally didn't bark at all but came up to them quietly—and started going through the house. They didn't find any stereos or TVs, and so the one that I shot (according to the one who told the story) got the idea of going after the old lady and making her tell them where she kept the jewels or stocks and bonds or whatever. They hadn't heard or seen her since breaking in and figured she was still asleep upstairs. So they started going through the upstairs rooms.

But they couldn't find her. They searched from room to room with their electric lantern—that was the light Velma Hapgood saw—but found no one.

Mrs. Rice had heard them, of course, as soon as they forced the door; when she found her telephone was dead she just dodged quietly from room to room, keeping out of their way. It was easy for her.

Finally in one room she squeezed behind a china cabinet, which stood a foot or so away from the wall. When she heard them come into the room she put her back against the cabinet and her feet against the wall, and when she heard them whispering in front of the cabinet she put all the strength she had into pushing that cabinet over on them.

One boy was able to get out of the way just in time, and, since Mrs. Rice was now out in the open, he caught her. I stepped in at that point.

We all are right proud of Mrs. Rice. Some of the fellows at the station house wanted to do something for her. We knew that she felt bad about losing her dog that way, so we talked to the chief, and the chief got in touch with the folks in Raleigh and arranged to get her another dog right away. It was delivered to her door last Tuesday, and she was tickled to get it so soon.

It's a fine animal. She says she never had a better seeing-eye dog in her life.

It wasn't easy interpreting dying messages, but the lieutenant had a knack for it!

Santa's Slaying

by STEVE LINDLEY

"HE'S A BUM," SERGEANT QUINLAN GROWLED, STARING at the headless corpse at our feet, chewing his cigar and spitting tobacco at me. "A dirty, filthy, no-good bum!"

"You're just angry with him because he left us a dying message," I said. It was the third dying message Quinlan had worked on this week, and he hated them almost as much as he hated his mother.

"No, lieutenant," he said back to me, suddenly the picture of angelic innocence. "I'm being literal-like. He was a bum. He only worked once a year—here. As Santa Claus."

We were standing on the beautifully sculptured lawn in front of Merrick's Department Store. It was Christmas Eve. They don't have snow in front of department stores on Christmas in Florida. So they have sculptured lawns.

"Decapitation," I said. "Ugly."

"You're telling me," Quinlan spat. "It took me ten minutes to wrestle the head away from a group of kids across the street. Their

soccer ball had deflated."

"World's not getting any sweeter," I sympathized. "But you said he left a dying message."

"He did. We found him clutching his hat."

"That is strange in a decapitation case."

"It was his Santa Claus cap."

"Hmmm," I pondered. I pointed at two men and a woman who were hunkering sheepishly by a bush. "Those the suspects?"

"Right," Quinlan answered. "None have alibis. The guy on the left is Christopher Krinkle. Store manager. The girl is a clerk. Mary Chris Mazz. And the guy with the red nose is—"

"Let me guess."

"Rudolf Deer. He's the gardener. Does nice work," Quinlan said, looking around him. "If we could only find the murder weapon. That might help us clear this all up."

I walked across the lawn to the gardener.

"Rudolf," I said. "Your begonias are breathtaking."

"Why thank you," he responded, beaming. "I—"

Catching him off guard, I wrestled him to the ground and slapped the cuffs on him.

"Book him, Quinlan."

"But how did you know?" the sergeant squealed. "The dying message could have implicated any of them."

"Not really," I answered. "You were right about the murder weapon clearing up the case. You should have checked the wounds on the dead man's neck."

"Oh no, lieutenant."

"Oh yes, sergeant. He was hack-hack-hacked with a hoe-hoe-hoe."

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Actor Reed Hadley played Captain Braddock in what TV series?

The series was "Racket Squad."

Chuck Ramsey, Joyce Ryan, and Ichabod Mudd were members of what organization?

They belonged to Captain Midnight's Secret Squadron.

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

Two novels of espionage by established professionals lead off this month. Those who think that all of the books in this sub-genre are alike will find these two very different indeed.

The first is *Spies* by Richard Ben Sapir. From the wreckage of a World War II German sub a tightly-sealed packet is recovered. It contains codebooks that prove the existence of German spies along the New England coast at the time of the conflict. Forty years later some of the former agents are living as well-established members of Newport society. Then the FBI begins its investigation. There is very little action as such; largely this is an examination of the lives of people desperately trying to escape their pasts. (Doubleday, \$16.95)

On the other hand, *The Brother of the Rose* by David Morrell is an action book from start to finish. An exasperating spymaster recruits likely candidates from orphanages and trains them, in pairs, to be super agents totally dedicated to him. The story virtually covers the globe as one of the agents awakens to how he and all the others are being used and strikes back. Gore and killings abound before the book reaches its climax and the disillusioned agent finally faces the man who has wrecked his life with constant trickery. An expert job that never lets up. (St. Martin's Marek, \$15.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The winner of the Scribner Crime Novel Award for 1984 is *Death at Charity Point* by William G. Tapply. As all winners in this competition are, this is a first novel, one that introduces attorney/private eye Brady Coyne. A man plunges to his death from a high cliff and leaves an apparent suicide note. But investigation shows he had no visible cause whatever to end his life and was fully involved in an interesting research project. The key is insurance, with a million dollar payoff if it wasn't suicide. This is a rather introspective book as Coyne probes into the private lives of the key persons involved. Despite this, the story holds attention and the ending is quite satisfactory. (Scribner's, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

For some time Shizuko Natsuki has been writing mysteries that have earned a notable popularity in her native Japan. Now, at last, we have an example of her work in *Murder at Mt. Fuji*, a book that has already sold 800,000 copies in Japan. Obviously this lady knows her stuff as she unfolds a story of homicide at a family chateau near Fujisan. A very wealthy family is desperately concerned with covering up a possible scandal and fakes an improbable story that the police quickly penetrate. The detective, however, is Jane Prescott, an American student fluent in Japanese, who is a New Year's houseguest. The story is a good one; the flow of language rests largely with the translator, Robert B. Rohmer, who should have been given more credit.

Miss Natsuki, Japan's best selling mystery author, has more than eighty books to her credit so far. Certainly it is more than time for her to appear on the international scene. (St. Martin's, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

William F. Buckley, Jr. brings back his detective, Blackford Oakes, in *The Story of Henri Tod*. This is another story about Berlin, in the midst of the cold conflict just before the Wall was built. A pair of care-free young lovers has discovered Hitler's private car and set up light housekeeping in the railroad yard. There are political overtones, as would be expected from the author, but there is also a considerable wit to this book as the Soviets try to probe the intentions and determinations of President Kennedy concerning Berlin. Well written and engaging, the story telling is enough to overcome the handicap of one more book about the tortured German metropolis. (Doubleday, \$14.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Magico Magazine offers two new Sherlockian items of outstanding quality. The first is a reprint of the now classic *A Study in Pictures* by the late James Montgomery. This is the first hardcover edition and is very handsomely done.

The second item is astonishing: *The Use of Disguise in Crime Detection* by none other than Sherlock Holmes himself, and edited by Val Andrews. This is reportedly a previously unpublished monograph written by the Master in January 1918. The work is enhanced by an introduction by High Pentecost. It is a brief but invaluable work as every true Sherlockian will attest. Both books are offered in trade and autographed editions. (Unfortunately Mr. Holmes is not available to autograph his monograph; Mr. Andrews and Mr. Pentecost have done so in his place.) The Montgomery book is \$25 for the trade edition, \$40

for the autographed, limited edition. The disguise book is, respectively, \$12.50 and \$25.00. (Magico Magazine, Box 156, New York, NY 10002)

☆ ☆ ☆

Colin D. Peel debuts in Doubleday's Crime Club with *Firestorm*. This is an action story that opens well and keeps moving, but in places it is so far-fetched that simple suspension of disbelief does not suffice. The actions of a British explosives expert, about whom the book is built, are at times incredibly stupid. When he is in urgent need of help, he flees from the very people best able to give it to him. The finale is in an interesting new locale that is very well set up, but what happens there cannot be credited. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: Exceptionally good is Ted Wood's *Dead in the Water*, the winner of the Scribner Crime Novel Award. Don't miss this one, now available from Bantam for \$2.50 . . . Avon is offering reprints of Richard Stark's novels about Parker, the very tough thief. Available titles are *The Score* and *Slayground*, each \$2.75. As almost everyone knows, Stark's real name is Donald E. Westlake, a man of highly versatile talents . . . Walker's British Mystery series continues with *Murder and Chips* by Laurie Mantell, *Hunter in the Dark*, by Estelle Thompson, and W. J. Burley's *Death in a Salubrious Place*. They are \$2.95 each . . . Penguin offers another Sir John Appleby mystery, *The Daffodil Affair* by the prolific, and popular Michael Innes for \$3.50. Also from Penguin is *The G-String Murders*, credited to the late stripteuse Gypsy Rose Lee but actually written by Craig Rice. Take it all off for \$3.95 . . . Harper's excellent reprint collection called the Perennial Library has just added Henry Wade's classic *Heir Presumptive* and *Year of the Golden Ape* by Colin Forbes, which is more of a suspense tale. They are \$3.50 and \$3.95 respectively . . . For high adventure mixed with a little science fiction try *The Takers* by Jerry Ahern. This is an original by Worldwide, \$3.50 . . . Los Angeles gets a heavy going over in Newton Thornburg's *Dreamland*. Pretty violent and sexy stuff with a private eye who knows the seamy side of the multinational city. Avon, \$3.75 . . . Machinations inside a mental hospital is the setting for Seymour Shubin's *Holy Secrets*, an original from Pocket Books. If your sleep has been too peaceful of late, here is a potent cure. \$3.95.

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